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THE GIRL WHO HATED AIR by Milton Lesser

to quote:

MILTON LESSER

The old editorial request—flattering but difficult because you'd rather write about other things—for some biographical material has hit me often enough so I know I'd better get in the statistical data before I'm sidetracked.

I was born in Brooklyn the year before they pulled the rug out from under the stock market, so I spent my early childhood in a depression and my later childhood in the biggest war to date. Since then I've been trying to live high off the hog like most of a hundred and sixty or so million other people.

There were four years out for college (William and Mary) and two years out for war (the Korean War, in which I rose to the not-too-exalted rank of corporal, U.S. Army). There was a succession of jobs running the gamut from bartender to semi-pro gambler. There is a wife (Leigh) and two young daughters (Deirdre and Robin). There is a house in suburban Syosset, Long Island and projected trips to far places, most of which haven't materialized at this writing. And there was, is, and will be a lot of writing.

I don't write science-fiction exclusively: I don't think anyone can do that and still turn out his best



work. But science-fiction affords the necessary change-of-pace that a much loved hobby gives anyone and science-fiction always has been my first love in writing. Some of you real old-timers may remember I came up as a fan, via letter columns, conventions and fanzines. I think this is something bound to help in my writing since science-fiction nourishes itself mostly from within. It's something which keeps science-fiction going, too, because a lot of the best loved names in the field came up that way.

I think s-f readers and writers are essentially optimists despite a few crack-of-doom stories. Mankind has a great future, all right—if we can survive the present!

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the Observatory

BY THE EDITOR

We've developed a real inferiority complex while trying to understand Salvador Dali's prediction for the year 2001 in the 30th Anniversary Issue of *Amazing Stories* (still on the stands).

For instance, Mr. Dali says, "Art is the reflection of the complete discontinuity of matter." Now that could mean—well, we'll pass it for the moment and go on. He further states: "By 2001 . . . artists . . . will portray this discontinuity in a new kind of explosive harmony." By that, he means—ah, we'll come back to it in a moment. Dali adds: "The secret of this harmony is to be seen today in cosmic radiation." Now we're getting somewhere. If Dali is referring to the atom bomb (but is he?) we agree. It can be pretty discontinuing. It can discontinue all of us and everything we stand on.

Dali states further: "All beauty is terrible. . . . Beauty is mathematical too." Here we see eye-to-eye with the great surrealist. Mathematics *are* terrible. We flunked math regularly in school and we can't keep our check book straight.

Mr. Dali seems to imply in his prediction that everything of any importance is bound irrevocably to the cauliflower and the rhinoceros horn. We like cauliflower very much but all we know about a rhinoceros horn is that it's one you don't blow. So we'll take his word for that.

He really confused us with this: ". . . cosmic radiation is causing the downfall of rigidity. . . . All things from architecture to politics . . . and becoming soft, fluid. . . ."

Thus he completely loses us. We would have no liking for a soft house and can't conceive of the flinty politicians we know as ever turning into jelly.

So please explain further, Mr. Dali.

P. W. F.

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CONTENTS

THE GIRL WHO HATED AIR By Milton Lesser.....	6
UNCLE KIM By Edmond Warren	45
THE SCARLET SAINT (Conclusion) By Manly Banister.....	52
KILLER CAT By Karl Stanley.....	86
OF MEN AND BUGS By Duane C. Morton.....	92
A TRIP TO ANYWHEN By Ivar Jorgensen.....	102

DEPARTMENTS

THE OBSERVATORY By The Editor.....	3
...OR SO YOU SAY By The Readers.....	123



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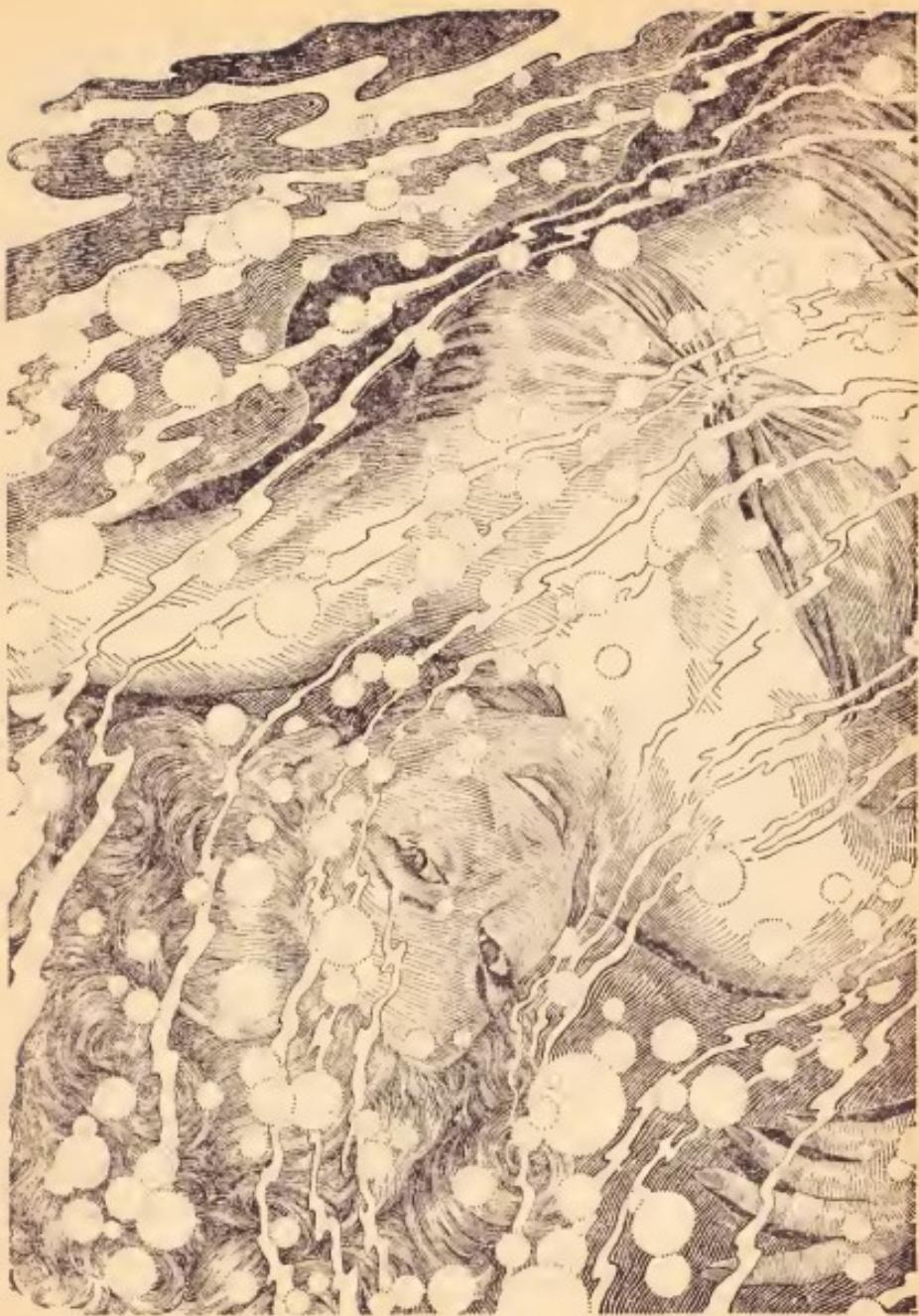
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She was Beauty in a strange and alien world.

The Girl Who Hated Air

By MILTON LESSER

She was a red-blooded American girl who had a talent for pranks—such as kidnaping Canopians, undersized extraterrestrials who had no sense of humor and didn't care to be hauled away from hearth and home. Then things began catching up with her and she got snatched herself—into a world that made no sense unless you thought it over while lying on the bottom of a lake.

HE WAS one of those men who had to carry Earth around with him wherever he went.

Turtles, we always called them—but never to their faces. Not to their faces because they had to be important people to lug Earth furniture and Earth office equipment across a few thousand light years, and even the smells of Earth wafted from an air-conditioning unit by an unseen fan, the crisp acrid scent of autumn leaves, the new green perfume of spring, the dry clean death smell of a Kansas hayfield in August.

"Come in, Kendricks," he

told me. "Come in and have a seat, take that chair there."

I walked across a deep pile Earth carpet and parked myself on a chair with an upholstered leather bottom and a high back and leather, iron-studded arms. No formoplast furniture for Mr. Ernest Carboy, I thought. Somehow I got the impression Carboy was as solid as the Earth I hadn't seen in five years, too. A big guy with hair going iron-grey at the temples and a lot of jowl but not soft and a voice for the lower register of barbershop quartets, he offered me a cigarette. Earth brand, of course.

As soon as I had decided I was going to like Ernest Carboy, he made me change my mind. He said, "What's the matter with you people, Kendricks? Don't you take this job of watching Earth citizens on alien worlds seriously?"

I didn't know what he was driving at, not yet, but I gave him the standard routine answer, the one approved of over in Terrestrial Special Services, where I work. I said, "Fairworld is not an alien planet, Mr. Carboy."

"Oh, don't give me that crap about Fairworld belonging to everybody."

"It does. Every planet owns its exhibit here. This is an Interplanetary Trade Fair, and—"

"You don't have to tell *me* that," Carboy bristled. "I'm United Carboy Enterprises, Kendricks. I know all about I.T.F. Hell, man, I've got the biggest Earth exhibit here."

"What did you want to see me about, Mr. Carboy?" I asked.

Carboy stood up and glowered down at me. "Some damn alien kidnapped my daughter," he said, and looked at me as if it were my fault.

At first it didn't register. Then suddenly the name meant something. Carboy.

Yvonne Carboy was the girl's name. I'd never pulled a job on her over at T.S.S., but I'd heard of guys who had. They didn't like it. They didn't like anything about Yvonne Carboy, even though she was probably the prettiest Earth girl from here all the way back to Deneb or Fomalhaut. Because she was also spoiled from her pretty toes up to her pretty ears. In the last month or so she had pulled a few capers which had kept some of the T.S.S. ops on their toes—and also kept them away from more important things.

"What do you mean she's been kidnapped?" I asked Ernest Carboy.

"I said she was kidnapped. Don't just sit there studying air."

"Last month," I said quietly, "didn't she do the kidnapping herself? Didn't we practically have to bail her out of a Canopian jail here on Fairworld?"

"That was different," said The Injured Father. "She's a good girl, Kendricks. Oh, she will have her pranks, but what red-blooded Earth girl won't?"

"They usually say Earth boy," I observed.

Carboy chuckled and told me I didn't know Yvonne, which was perfectly true. So

far I had managed to get along without knowing her. Then he added, "She didn't kidnap anybody, anyhow. She just sort of detained a couple of Canopians because she couldn't get over the idea of perfectly-formed human beings exactly two-feet tall—full grown. Hell, man, she let them go unharmed, didn't she?"

I shrugged. "Your girl wasn't on that caper alone, was she, Mr. Carboy?"

"Damn you, Kendricks. Yvonne's missing. I thought we were talking about that."

"We are. If she pulled a crazy caper once, she might pull it again. With the same party. How the devil do you know she was kidnapped? Kidnapped is a funny word, Mr. Carboy. It usually brings to mind ransom notes and a planetwide dragnet and a lot of unpleasantness between the Earth government and the other world governments here on Fairworld. That's what Terrestrial Special Services is for, Mr. Carboy. To prevent unpleasantness."

"You didn't prevent them kidnapping my girl."

"She pulled off that Canopian stunt with whom?" I asked.

Carboy shook his head and gave me a hard angry look, but said, "A Vegan named Ultoste."

A Vegan, I thought. It would be a Vegan. Because the Vegans alone in the galaxy had human shape and human size, just like Earthmen. So a Vegan and an Earthgirl got together and pulled a crazy kidnap stunt on the undersized Canopians and had a damn near half of T.S.S. cooperating with our Canopian opposite numbers and making Earth look bad in the process.

"All right," I said. "I'll see Ultoste. I'll see the Canopians, too. I can get their names back at T.S.S. headquarters. How long has Yvonne Carboy been missing?"

"Three days, Kendricks."

"Any word from her?"

Carboy shook his shaggy head. "Nothing. She just disappeared after one of those big interworld parties the Arcturians like to give. I wasn't there."

The Arcturians, I thought. Now I had a Vegan named Ultoste, a couple of pride-injured Canopians and the whole Arcturian delegation to Fairworld to worry about. Because a capering filly like Yvonne Carboy had probably decided to go off on a little junket somewhere — beyond Ophiuchus maybe, or to the Nebula in Lyra, or clean back to Earth for all I knew.

"She went to the party alone?" I asked.

"Ultoste," Carboy said, and after that there was a little silence which I used to get myself out of the Earth-style chair and pump Carboy's big hard hand and say we would keep in touch with him and would he please tell us, in the meantime, if Yvonne just happened to turn up after all of her own free will.

From the door I asked, "What did Ultoste have to say about it?"

"Nothing helpful. Yvonne drifted off with some other planetary group at the party, he says. He doesn't remember who. He did not see her home—he says."

"You have reason to doubt it?"

"I just don't like Ultoste or the Vegans," Carboy said frankly. He didn't stand alone. I'm no psychologist so I can't say why, but a lot of Earthmen I've met out here say they'd rather take their aliens with tentacles or skin as hard as steel or radial symmetry or scales and tails. Looking at the Vegans, maybe, was too much like looking at a mirror. There was also no love lost between Earth and Vega, which made me wonder about Yvonne Carboy going out with the Vegan Ultoste at all.

I got out of Carboy's Earth-style office and verbaled in my preliminary report, then looked at my chrono and decided I still had time to pay Ultoste a visit before I called it a day.

The Vegan Exhibit of Fairworld stood on a high hill overlooking a stream and green woods. The stream was swift and even from here looked cold, and it made you think of New England in the late spring—but New England is a long way from Vega, and both are an even longer way from Interplanetary Trade Fair. Like all the exhibits here, the Vegan was encased in its own invisible force field in which Vegan temperature and atmosphere were faithfully reproduced. Many of the denizens of Fairworld would need vac-suit equipment here, but an Earthman never would. Earthmen and Vegans, by a quirk of interstellar evolution or through some prehistoric link we know nothing about, had evolved under almost identical conditions.

Ultoste turned out to be P.R. man for a Vegan manufacturer of spaceships and vac-suit equipment. Like Earth, Vega was a big exporter. But spaceships were

tricky items to sell to alien worlds and as a rule outfits like Vegan Rockets didn't do too well.

Ultoste was in conference with a couple of leather-hided Sirians when I got there. I listened while he gave them the sales-pitch, and the Sirians—who spoke in clicks and grunts which would have made Oxford English out of Hottentot according to my lexicon—the Sirians listened too. Probably if I remained on Fairworld another twenty years I wouldn't get used to the translators which were standard equipment around here. I wear my own imbedded in my palate and it can translate into any one of five-hundred-odd interstellar languages as fast as I can talk for pickup units imbedded in mastoid bones or hearing orifices of whoever is listening. That way, it doesn't sound like a babel. All you ever hear on Fairworld is your own language, perfectly spoken, without accent. That's all anyone else hears, too, and it's a little eerie seeing lizards from Centauri or the mouthless tuskers of Epsilon Aurigae or the sentient protoplasmic blobs of Capella talking perfect English while everyone else understands simultaneously in a hundred other lan-

guages. Very complicated.

After the Sirians had gone, I told Ultoste who I was. It didn't get a rise out of him. He had no reason to expect a visitor from T.S.S., apparently. He was a good-looking guy about my own age, which is thirty. He had the very dark leathery-looking hair of the Vegan and the gray skin. It isn't really gray, although people always say Vegan skin is gray skin. It is gray in the same way that my skin is white. That is, it's a kind of pink-tan color with gray overtones. Don't get me wrong, though. Vegan skin is not corpse gray. There is nothing unhealthy looking about it. It's just gray—call it Vegan gray and let it go at that.

"There is something, Mr. Kendricks?" Ultoste asked me.

"Yvonne Carboy," I said.

He went on smiling. It was a good professional smile with nothing personal in it. It was a smile which could sell you spaceships or drink martinis with you. It was a smile which meant nothing in particular and went very well with Ultoste's handsome gray face.

"I don't understand," Ultoste told me almost reluctantly after he had waited a few seconds for me to say some-

thing other than Yvonne Carboy's name.

"You know her?"

"Certainly, Mr. Kendricks. Yvonne is fun."

"You took her to a party at the Arcturian Exhibit?"

He nodded. "Not the Exhibit, really. Their living quarters. I already spoke to Mr. Carboy about that, Kendricks. I never took Yvonne home from that party. Don't tell me she's still missing?"

I told him she was still missing, and watched the professional smile leave his face slowly. I said, "Tell me what happened with the two Canopians?" There was no real reason why I should harp on that Canopian Caper, but so far it seemed the best thing I had to go on.

Ultoste shrugged. "A joke," he said. "Just a joke, Kendricks. We certainly didn't mean them any harm."

"I thought they called it kidnapping."

"But we returned them."

"They still called it kidnapping."

"People two feet tall," Ultoste said. "With two-feet-tall-minds. What can you expect?"

I admitted I did not know what I could expect, and we chatted for a few minutes after that, getting nowhere. I

thanked Ultoste for his time and went outside into the pseudo-Vegan sunshine and watched the brook gushing through the woodlands down below. Then I radio'd headquarters and got a line through to the Canopus Exhibit, wondering about Ultoste while I waited. I decided I was in Carboy's camp. I didn't like Ultoste and I didn't know why I didn't like him. I wished it was simple for me, like it was for Carboy. Ultoste was a Vegan and Earthmen and Vegans, like Hatfields and McCoys, are not supposed to like one another. But that didn't tie it for me. There was something I didn't like about Ultoste, but it was both personal and vague and it meant absolutely nothing.

"This is the Canopian Exhibit," a voice said in the pick-up unit in my ear. "Good afternoon, sir."

I identified myself, and since the call had been channeled through T.S.S. and the Canopians could pick that fact up on their monitor, verbal identification was enough. Then I said, "Two Canopians were involved in a disturbance with a man from Vega and an Earthgirl a while ago—"

"Yes?"

"I'd like an appointment to see them."

There was a pause. Then : "But that is impossible, sir."

"Impossible why?"

"Or Dauro and Par Tisgan, to whom you refer, left on a liner bound for Canopus yesterday. Is there anyone else?"

I said there was no one else and cut the connection. I took a copter-cab back to headquarters and went over what I had. I didn't have much. I had a girl—now missing—who was in on a phoney kidnapping stunt, but the victims were gone and couldn't tell me a thing about it. I had a Vegan who had been in on the stunt with her and who had been with her at the Arcturan party, the last place she was seen by anyone. Said Vegan either couldn't or wouldn't tell me anything. I didn't like said Vegan but it never helped to bring personal feeling into a case, so I let that ride.

All I had left was an Arcturan party. At least, that was what I thought until I returned to the Terrestrial Special Services office.

Where they dropped a bomb in my lap.

"Don't bother sitting down," the chief told me after I had given him what little information I had. "You'll only jump right up again." The chief wasn't grinning, so

I didn't grin, either. The chief had been head of the T.B.I.—that's the Terrestrial Bureau of Investigation—before coming out here to take over Terrestrial Special Services at Interplanetary Trade Fair. He looked amazingly young but he always said one morning he was going to wake up an old man. He didn't look past forty or forty-five, but he had been chief of T.B.I. for fifteen years and chief out here with T.S.S. for another ten.

"What have you got, chief?" I asked him.

"First tell me this: you probably think the Carboy girl went someplace on her own free will, right?"

"I figured that was a distinct possibility."

"Well, don't bank on it."

"We never bank on anything," I said, quoting the chief.

He grinned at that and said, "Fact is, Dick, while T.S.S. has only one strange disappearance case to worry about —she's sitting in your lap, son —the other planetary outfits out here have others."

"On a world as big and crowded and involved as Fairworld—"

The chief shook his head. "Legitimate missing persons," he informed me. "Fifty seven of them at last count, Dick.

That's too many to be explained by the confusion of a cosmopolitan trade fair of all the planets. Isn't it? Especially since most of them have been missing long enough to establish the fact that they really are missing?"

I asked the chief what he knew about it.

"Agencies like T.S.S. cooperate with their opposite numbers, naturally. We know as much about it as anyone on Fairworld—which is almost nothing. They just disappeared. Creatures from all the worlds, here on Fairworld on business."

"Like somebody was collecting specimens," I said for some reason. It should have been good for a grin even if it was a little out of place, but the chief didn't grin. He said:

"That isn't as funny as it sounds, Dick. Fairworld is the place to go, if you want specimens."

"I see what you mean. Saves you the trouble of galavanting all over the galaxy. You can get most of the intelligent life forms right here. But why?"

The chief shrugged. I had been here with T.S.S. for five years and I had never seen him shrug before. The chief wasn't the shrugging kind. "Nobody said specimens were being collected, Dick. It was

just talk. You meant it to be funny, didn't you?"

I nodded and asked, "With all those disappearances isn't there any M.O. which becomes apparent?"

The chief lit a pipe and the scent of Centaurian tobacco filled the room. "Just one thing, Dick, which may mean everything or may mean nothing."

"One thing? What?"

The chief said, "Ultoste."

"Ultoste?"

"Fifty - seven disappearances, Dick. They're not our babies—until the Carboy girl came along. But they all have one thing in common. Ultoste. Ultoste knew every one of them."

I rolled that one around for a moment and said, "I see what you mean. It could mean everything or nothing because Ultoste is a P.R. man and it's his business to know people, a lot of people, as many people as possible."

"Exactly."

"But haven't the others done anything about Ultoste before this?"

"What can they do, Dick? His hands seem to be clean. He's a Vegan citizen and he's done nothing the Vegan government doesn't like. He hasn't done anything specific

any other government doesn't like, either. And you know the first rule out here: never, never step on interstellar toes. Don't step anyplace until you're dead sure."

"So they've done nothing about Ultoste?"

"I didn't say that. Probably a dozen worlds have him shadowed, but if they learned anything they haven't revealed it at the weekly liaison meetings. Maybe the Canopians could have told you something, but the Canopians are gone."

"Yeah," I said.

"There's another Arcturian party tonight."

"That right?" I said, perking up.

"Same crowd of people. The Arcturians are great-party-throwers, Dick. You'll go?"

"Ultoste will be there?"

"So I've heard."

"Damn right I'll go," I said.

"Listen, Dick. We don't want any premature—"

"We never, never step on interstellar toes'," I quoted.

The chief gave me his famous grin. Just then the intercom buzzed and the chief said what is it and then gave the hook-up to me and for the next five minutes I listened to Outraged Poppa Ernest Carboy ranting about his missing daughter and wanting to

know why I hadn't done anything about it yet. I cupped the speaker and asked the chief, "Ernest Carboy—his toes are interstellar too?"

Grinning again, the chief nodded. So I listened to Carboy for five more minutes, occasionally grunting to let him know I was still there. When I cut the connection the chief said:

"What did he want?"

"Nothing. Nothing but to do a little chewing out. You can't blame him, but—"

"But what, Dick?"

"But you don't have to like him, either."

"As long as he doesn't hear about it. Same goes for Ultoste too. Well, have fun at the Arcturian party, Dick."

"Fun, the man says."

But two hours later I was on my way to the party.

I spent some time rubbing shoulders, tentacles, scales, heads, pseudopods, claws, pincers and what-have-you's with the Arcturians and their guests. The Arcturians themselves are reptilian. Since all worlds start more or less with the same type of life form—an undifferentiated protoplasmic blob—evolution tends to follow the same pattern on most worlds, except that the emphasis is never the same.

Thus on Arcturus the giant saurians, instead of becoming extinct as they had on Earth, had merely lost most of their size, surrendering it for intelligence and continued mastery of their world. Result: Arcturian reptiles showed their wares at a Fairworld visited by intelligent cephalopods, intelligent insects, intelligent crustaceans, and intelligent mammals.

It was like an after-dinner party everywhere, although a newcomer to Fairworld wouldn't have exactly felt at home among the specimens of a hundred or so worlds and even an old-timer would have felt completely at a loss without his tiny translator.

I drank and talked and mostly listened—and watched for Ultoste. He didn't come until quite late. I had almost given up and gone home when suddenly I spotted his gray face on the punch line. I went over for some punch and some talk myself. Everything boiled down to Ultoste. It was Ultoste or nothing, Ultoste or a blind alley. Because I had tried over cocktails with small talk, I had mentioned Yvonne Carboy's name but it got a rise out of no one. I had mentioned her name and some of them had heard of her and some had not. One or two even

knew she was missing: apparently Ernest Carboy had conducted an investigation of his own before he contacted Terrestrial Special Services. But no one could tell me how or why.

No one? There was Ultoste. "Mr. Kendricks," he said. "Isn't it? The T.S.S. The Guardian."

"That's a pretty fancy title," I told him over punch.

"The Vegan equivalent of your T.S.S. is our Guardian Corps, you see."

I said I saw and we talked about a lot of little things. I finally steered the conversation around to Vegan Spaceships because a man always can be counted on to do more talking when he's talking about his field of interest.

"Must be a funny business," I observed, "trying to sell spaceships on the interstellar markets. I mean, different planetary requirements being so different."

"You must offer more than the next fellow, like anything else," Ultoste told me. "If you cannot compete in luxurious custom interiors with the local competition on any given world, you must surpass them in some other fashion."

"Such as what?"

"Such as speed, my dear Mr. Kendricks. I will not claim

that the Vegans have a monopoly on speed, but I need only point out that Vegan spaceships have won the Interstellar Cup three competitions running. Pardon me, Mr. Kendricks, I don't mean to sound provincial, I'm sorry if—”

“Not at all,” I assured him. “You won the Interstellar Cup three times running. That's an objective fact. Go on.”

“Speed,” said Ultoste. “We sell spaceships, we sell more spaceships to the export market than any other world, because we feature speed.”

He was speaking avidly now. He was all wrapped up in his subject and I didn't know where it would lead but I wanted to keep it that way. “I've always been a bug on speed myself,” I said.

“Even our one-man personal flyers, Kendricks. Meteors, we call them. Even our little Meteor sportsters can out-speed most cruisers ten times their size.”

“I never could figure out why I was so hepped up about speed, Ultoste,” I said. “After a certain point—after five hundred times light speed in sub-space drive, for example, what's the point, really?”

“What's the point?” Ultoste repeated my question in a politely scathing voice.

“What's the point indeed? Need I remind you that the Interstellar Congress of Worlds, of which your Earth and my Ontagi—which you call Vega because you have named our sun Vega—need I remind you that the Interstellar Congress of Worlds is actually a congress of worlds in only one small corner of our galaxy, representing hardly more than one percent of the estimated inhabited planets in an area containing two percent of the stars in the galaxy?”

“Sure, but—”

“But speed, Mr. Kendricks. Speed is everything. Upon speed will be determined how far we can go, how much we can see. Because even five-hundred-trans-light is a finite speed. It would take one Earth year to go a distance of five hundred light years at such a speed, you see, but the galaxy is fifty thousand light years across! What would you say to a speed of—say, five thousand trans-light?”

“Five thousand!” I repeated. I wasn't acting now. I was stunned. Even the experimental model, you hear about rarely exceed sub-space speeds one thousand times the speed of light. Even with those experimental beauties it would take better than half a year

to go, say, from Earth to Deneb. But with speeds of five thousand trans-light. . . .

"Five thousand," Ultoste said. "Of course, we are not yet in production with it. It is not yet for export consumption. But think of it, Mr. Kendricks. We'll blast back the barrier of the Sagittarian Swarms at last with speeds like that. We'll push right through to the heart of the galaxy beyond Sagittarius and Ophiuchus. We'll. . . ."

His eyes were rapt now. He was completely absorbed in the prospect of those fantastic speeds. He wasn't talking to Dick Kendricks, Earthman, T.S.S. agent. He was musing out loud. He was off somewhere in the uncharted depths of space beyond Sagittarius and Ophiuchus. It had worked even better than I could have expected—and I still didn't know where it might lead.

"Sure," I told him. "Eventually we'll get that far. But right now those are just pipe-dreams, aren't they?"

Ultoste laughed. It was a polite but mildly contemptuous laugh. Then Ultoste said, "These are no pipedreams. Why, already our experimental ships have gone beyond Sagittarius to—" Abruptly he stopped. There had never been a report of a trip beyond Sag-

ittarius. It was the known edge of the universe—at least the edge of the explored universe. Beyond its vast star swarms, on which Fairworld bordered so that its night sky was a glowing splendor, nothing was known. If there had been a trip through the swarms and the interstellar gas and the dust clouds, it would have been big news.

At that point I made a mistake. Ultoste had clammed up but it might have been only temporary. "Would you care to put that in writing?" I said.

Ultoste looked at me, and through me. His eyes became disinterested, distant, cold. He said, "You must realize that as a P.R. man I have to shake more hands and tentacles than you, as a Guardian. If you will excuse. . . . ?"

And Ultoste wandered off. I spent the next hour or so making small talk with assorted creatures and bringing Yvonne Carboy's name up occasionally, but my heart was no longer in it. Sure, Yvonne Carboy was missing. Sure, it was my job to find her.

But if what Ultoste had inadvertently uttered was true—if even half of it was true—it was far more important than Yvonne Carboy.

After a while I tried to find

Ultoste at one of the food tables or the punchbowl, but I didn't see him anywhere. There were three or four other Vegans at the party and I asked them about their compatriot, but they shrugged and said they had seen him earlier in the evening but not in the last hour or so. I checked with the Arcturian hosts, who hadn't seen Ultoste either.

It was past midnight on Fairworld when I decided to call it a night. I got my raincoat and went outside. The raincoat was necessary because it was always raining in the Arcturian section of Fairworld. The Arcturians, deluged by several thousand inches of rain every year, would consider Earth's deepest tropical rain forest a near-desert. It was rainy and it was also sultry and I was wet through and through, raincoat or no, by the time I reached the edge of the Arcturian landscape and the lock in the forcefield.

I was sticky with moisture and my head was buzzing with a lot of unanswered questions about fantastic translight speeds.

Maybe the combination explains why I was a sucker for whoever came up behind me and brought the black night down on my head.

There was pain and blackness and a deep-throated roaring sound.

There was a face—Ultoste's.

There was the familiar gut-wrenching pressures of blast-off and I knew—when I was still too stunned and too hurt to know anything else—that we were in deep space. And then there was the sudden lightheadedness which comes from switchover to subspace. There was all this without once actually regaining consciousness.

And there were drugs.

The needle's sting was felt—several times. I had opened my eyes only once, and then to see Ultoste's face. But I knew I was being drugged. Once my retinas behind closed lids registered an increase in light and then there was a sound like an iris-door opening and closing again, the metal-scraping of a gigantic, slow-motion camera shutter. Someone came toward me and I tried to roll away, but I seemed to be strapped to a bunk. Then the quick sting of the needle, and oblivion again.

It was horribly impersonal. Horribly, that's the only word I can use. I lay there a long time, bunk-strapped, drugged, without seeing. I never once thought of Dick Kendricks. I

wasn't Dick Kendricks. I wasn't anyone specific. I was a vague sense of being drugged and a vague groping toward personality and a vague sense of fear of the unknown. I felt nothing but the occasional sting of the needle and nothing else really mattered.

On Earth we too have such drugs. We call them the lethe drugs because they are drugs of forgetfulness. If a man is confronted with something his ego absolutely cannot face, if facing it means personality disintegration—nervous breakdown, they used to call it—then the lethe drugs are used. And slowly, personality is rebuilt in such a way that the patient is once again an oriented, integrated personality. Also, the lethe drugs can be used to strip a man of his personality and rebuild it from scratch—any way the builder wants.

I don't know how long I wasn't Dick Kendricks. They say that three weeks of the lethe drugs are enough to rob a man of his ego entirely, so it couldn't have been three weeks.

Because suddenly the needle was gone.

I floated there, in limbo, neither knowing who I was nor caring—for several days, I think. Then one day out of a

deep black void, bottomless and frightening, a name came to me.

Kendricks, Richard.
Terrestrial Special Services Agent Richard Kendricks.

A nice name, I thought. Any name would have been nice. It was so nice to have a name and an identity again. I explored the name and every few minutes discovered another facet of my self. Pretty soon integration had returned, and memory.

A spaceship and a drug.
Subspace travel and the forgetfulness of the lethe drugs.
Ultoste.

He came into the room and for the first time I got out of my figurative shell and looked at the room. One wall. A round room with one unbroken, unseamed wall. You couldn't even tell where the door was after Ultoste had come in and the complicated iris mechanism shut slowly behind him.

"How's the personality?" Ultoste asked.

I wondered if I could get away with a disintegrated ego act. I decided I couldn't. I said, "All in one piece, no thanks to you."

"Oh, you can thank me," Ultoste said. I was careless with the lethe series. We ran

out of it so you're still here as Richard Kendricks."

"Who was I going to be?" I asked.

"Oh, Richard Kendricks. We'd have given you the same name. We are not prejudiced against the name."

"Where are we going?" I asked. I had already felt that pressure on my upper arms and across my knees. I was strapped securely in a blastoff web but I knew without exploring it that it wouldn't be the kind a man could unfasten without help.

"Fifty seven," Ultoste said dreamily.

"What did you say?"

"Fifty seven. It was all they wanted. The fifty-eighth is a bonus, you might say. They ought to be pleased. I could have killed you, naturally. But that was foolish if you might be worth money to me. Yes?"

I looked at Ultoste and did some wondering. The Vegans are not trouble-makers, whether most Earthmen cotton to them or not. The Vegans would be very careful selecting their people for Fairworld, as every other planet was. Then did that mean that Ultoste had been lethed himself? It was a good question but for the moment it hardly mattered. If he had been disintegrated and then

reintegrated differently under the influence of lethe, the old Ultoste, the Ultoste I had never known, hardly mattered. The new Ultoste was the Ultoste of record. I said,

"You mentioned a number before. Fifty-seven. That happens to be the number of creatures kidnapped from Fairworld. Any connection?"

"What do you think?"

"It would be quite a coincidence."

"Naturally, Sagittarian money would be entirely useless, but if I were paid for each of the fifty seven in his own weight in gold...."

"Sagittarian money?"

"The thousand-translightships. We're beyond the Swarm, Kendricks. You knew that, didn't you? The Sagittarians are a curious people—and I mean that both ways."

"You mean that how?"

"Peculiar, and inquisitive. Peculiar because while their science would astound you—for example, they have a refinement of the lethe drugs which not only disintegrates the ego and makes reintegration simple but which can also disintegrate and reintegrate physiological and chemical structure and function. But you will see all that later. Inquisitive, yes, but while this

astonishing science of theirs could rule the galaxy, they're content to remain in their own little corner—satisfying their curiosity about the nature of the universe."

I wondered why Ultoste was telling me this. He just nave sensed that, for he said:

"This was to have been part of your reintegration, Kendricks. You were to accept the fact that the Sagittarian home planet, although it contains the most advanced culture in the galaxy, is one vast museum, zoological and botanical gardens. That's all they want, the Sagittarians. Strange?"

"I never met them," I said.

"Actually," Ultoste went on, more to himself now than to me, "they have pairs of everything from our section of the galaxy, except Earth humans. They only have a woman. They ought to be pleased with you."

"What the hell are you?" I said suddenly. "A zoological procurer?"

Ultoste grinned. "I had not thought of it quite that way." He was still grinning when the lightheadedness which meant the translight ship was hitting switchover again before returning to normal space, struck again. Ultoste pressed a section of the wall

and instantly a vidscreen appeared. First there was a view over the tail vane of the spaceship. Behind us was the dazzling curtain of the Sagittarian Swarm and I knew without being told that we were now on the far side of that Swarm. Then that view faded completely and there was a vid-shot forward.

There was nothing but black space.

It was awesome—and totally unexpected.

For this was the heart of the galaxy, or as close to the heart of the galaxy as man had ever come. Interstellar distances more nearly interplanetary had been expected here.

Instead, the featureless black void. . . .

And, incredibly, a single big planet.

Sunless. . . .

It hung in the black immensity ahead of us like a single blood-red ruby on a field of velvet black. It was not actually a planet. It was the dying ember of a star. A star which had gone cool but not quite cold, a star with a solid blood-red surface and its own feeble source of heat and light and a life form which had developed nothing more inspiring than a planetwide museum-zoo-botanical gardens with the

galaxy's most advanced culture.

If you could believe Ultoste.

There was no reason not to believe him. He had been reintegrated. Of course, the reintegration could have been a tissue of lies, but the masters of the dying ruby-red star-ember wouldn't boast of their achievement. It was simply not the sort of thing you pounded your chest about.

"You tried to kidnap the two Canopians too, didn't you?" I asked Ultoste suddenly.

"Yes. Miss Carboy found out and was very foolish about it, even though I offered her half the gold. She allowed the Canopians to escape and made them think it all had been some ill-conceived joke. But she knew so much that when the Sagittarians asked for a human specimen, it came to me at once that I could kill two birds with one stone, as the saying goes."

We swept on toward the blood-red star-ember which now was a planet. Ultoste strapped himself in a blastoff hammock when the warning light flashed and seconds later a few tons of pressure took the form of two big invisible feet and began to do a polka on my stomach.

Shaken and pale, Ultoste

unstrapped himself a few minutes later. There had been the thumping jar of touch-down and then a silence. We had landed on the red world.

Ultoste came over to me. At first I thought he was going to get me loose, but without warning he produced one of those hyper-sprays which are beginning to replace hypodermic needles around the galaxy. At first I thought it was more of the lethe drug, but then I remembered that had been administered with a hypodermic. Then I felt the quick cool sensation of the hyperspray against my arm as a few thousand microscopic jets under pressure forced the unknown fluid in subcutaneously without even breaking the skin.

"Pleasant dreams," Ultoste said.

Somewhere nearby, water babbled and gurgled in a brook. It flowed swiftly because this was hilly country, with naked rocks thrusting up like bones through the bare earth and the patches of grass.

It was New England country, something like the Vegan area of Fairworld, but nicer. I'm a sucker for New England country, so I got up and went looking for the brook. When I was a kid I used to go after

brown trout in a brook that sounded just like this one, and I found the idea infinitely soothing.

Too soothing—

"Hello, there!" the girl's voice called. "What in the world are you doing here?"

It was a good question. I looked around. I couldn't see the girl but I was willing to bet her name would be Yvonne Carboy.

"I can't see you," I shouted.

"The other side of the stream. That's right, walk straight ahead. You'll see it over that outcropping. There. Hi!"

"Hi yourself," I said. I stood on a little rise of ground which fell away through a copse of woods to the swift-flowing brook. On the other side stood the girl.

My breath caught in my throat, but she seemed utterly unselfconscious. She was very beautiful. She was wearing an abbreviated leotard-like garment the color of blood and as close to her skin as her skin was to her flesh. She was wearing absolutely nothing under under the leotard and you didn't need a magnifying glass or even a second glance to see that. And she was smiling. It was an inviting smile. It was the kind of smile which would make a man swim the

Amazon River at its mouth, where the Amazon River is a hundred miles across.

This brook was exactly ten feet across and never more than thigh-deep. I found that out as I waded and splashed across.

"I was waiting for you," she said. "But I'm mad. I'm mad at you."

She said it just like a little girl. She was Yvonne Carboy, all right. I had seen Yvonne Carboy's picture. But she was a reintegrated Yvonne Carboy.

"Why are you mad at me?" I said. She had spoken like a little girl, but she didn't look like anybody's idea of a little girl who would speak like that. It was the reintegration, of course. Somehow a beautiful but naive and all but naked girl went along with this sylvan New England woodland. New England? It could have been ancient Greece, too, with the limey rocks protruding from the soil. Ancient Greece and a woodland nymph. . . .

"Because of the air," Yvonne Carboy said.

"The air?"

"I'm mad at you because of the air. That's how I knew you were coming, you see. Because of the air. All of a sudden it came blowing in here with big gusts and a lot of hissing."

"Came blowing in here?" I repeated her words. "None of the trees, none of all this life, none of the birds you hear, could live a minute without it. And neither could you, Yvonne."

"You know me? Oh, isn't that exciting!" She seemed genuinely pleased. With a little squeal she threw herself into my arms and she felt wonderful but I felt ridiculous. I extricated myself and that made her pout. "Well after all," she said, still pouting, "I've been waiting for you all my life."

"How long is that?"

"Two months tomorrow. I'm two months old. They said I would have a mate soon."

She gave me a funny kind of look and I backed away. She pouted once more and said, "I wish you wouldn't. You're embarrassing me. They're watching us, you know."

"Who's watching us?"

"Why, the Sagittarians of course."

I whirled and looked around. I didn't see anyone. I took a few steps in each direction. I peered behind trees and began to feel foolish. I still didn't see anyone.

"Oh, you can't see them. It would spoil their fun if you

could see them. But they have pickup units planted everywhere. Isn't it exciting?"

"Let's talk about the air," I said.

"There wasn't any, until you came."

"But the birds—"

"They're not real. Neither are the trees. Or the smells or the grass or anything. Aren't they ingenious? I mean, because they look so real and feel so real and everything."

"Are you real?"

"Who me? Of course I'm real. But I don't like air."

"Listen," I said, almost desperately. "You're Yvonne Carboy. You're an Earthgirl. You were kidnapped from Fairworld on the other side of the Sagittarian Swarm and your father wanted me to find you. And you like air. You have to like air. You breathe air. If you don't breathe air, you die. You've been reintegrated, that's all. But you breathe. You *breathe*."

"Oh, not me," Yvonne said, still smiling prettily. "That's part of the reintegration. The physiological integration change. I don't have to breathe. They don't have oxygen in the natural state here on World."

"World?"

"World. You can't see any other planet this side of Sagit-

tarius, can you? This is World."

"Yvonne," I said. I was just talking. There was no reason to, not really. She was reintegrated. I was light years away. I hadn't been reintegrated and for some reason the inhabitants of World, the curators of this zoo, had known that and hadn't minded. I was so many light years away that we just couldn't get together. But anyway, I asked, "Why do you hate air?"

"Why do you like air?" Yvonne asked. "I'll tell you why. Because you need it. Well, I don't need it. When you don't need a thing like air you get to realize that it's—well, for one thing, it's dirty. It's always filled with particles and things." She gave me that smile again. I backed away from her and she said, "Do we have to talk about air?"

We had to talk about something, I thought. She was very beautiful and since her reintegration said I had been given to her as her mate, she was waiting, calm as could be, for me to make love to her.

Which, as they say, would have been very sweet dalliance indeed.

Except that, somewhere deep inside this naive wood-

land nymph, Yvonne Carboy was waiting. Not utterly obliterated, because you never are utterly obliterated in disintegration and reintegration. Waiting—perhaps, if I could get her out of here, to be born again. And maybe deep down, so deep inside the subconscious of the new creature which looked exactly like Yvonne Carboy but was not really Yvonne Carboy at all except physically, maybe the real Yvonne was there, helpless, a prisoner inside herself, watching and experiencing and feeling but unable to do a thing about it. Thinking of that Yvonne Carboy, I backed away from the beautiful creature in the blood-red skin-tight leotard.

And fell into the stream.

Laughing, Yvonne came after me playfully. She splashed in the water where it was almost waist-deep. She came at me as I scrambled to my feet, splashing water at me. She laughed and it was a wholesome laugh. She said, "You still don't believe me about the air?"

I shrugged, then decided it was something to talk about. And looking at her there in the water next to me, dripping wet and beautiful, I needed something to talk about. The Sagittarians had left me with

all my human impulses. Maybe, I suddenly realized, that was the general idea.

"Then I'll show you!" Yvonne cried, and dropped under the surface of the brook like a stone.

It was a good trick. It startled me that at first I did nothing about it and, when I was able to do something about it, I saw it wasn't necessary to do anything.

Yvonne had stretched herself out on the streambed. That was the good trick—I don't know how she did it. I would have floated to the top, but then, I suddenly realized, I need air. I have air inside of me. The air makes me buoyant.

She lay there, eyes open, mouth open, smiling at me. She made exaggerated motions with her lips to show she was breathing.

Breathing water.

I stood there looking down, watching her inhale and exhale water smilingly. It had utterly no effect on her.

Yvonne Carboy knew what she was talking about. Yvonne Carboy didn't breathe. If she didn't like air, if she hated air, that was her business. Point was, she didn't need it.

After a while she came back to the surface and stood there, her eyes smiling, with the

water gushing from her mouth. She was a little breathless when it was all over, but none the worse from her experience.

"Now do you believe me?" she wanted to know.

"Yeah."

"Then come on."

"Where to?"

"I have a cave, silly."

"A—cave?"

"Goodness, yes. It's where I live. Come on."

"And just like that we're supposed to spend the rest of our lives here?"

"Why, yes." She looked puzzled. "Of course we are."

"Doesn't the name Yvonne Carboy mean anything to you?"

"Of course it does. It's my name. It's a nice name, isn't it?"

"But you—"

"I am Yvonne Carboy," she recited, abruptly serious. "I am two months old. Or, I'll be two months old tomorrow. I am going to live here with you for the rest of my—"

"You mean it's been two months since your reintegration. Don't you understand?"

"But of course I understand. I was born two months ago. Or, if you prefer, I was reborn. Is there anything odd about that?"

"No, but—"

"Then come *on*—". And Yvonne tugged at my hand.

"Yvonne," I said, "wait a minute. I'm going to get out of here. Somehow, someway, I'm going to get out of here. And I'm going to take you with me."

That got another naive little, pretty little smile out of her. She said, "Oh, isn't it exciting?"

"Isn't what exciting?"

"That we're going to try and escape. Of course I'll go with you."

"I thought you said you were perfectly content—"

"To spend the rest of my life here? But I am."

"You said—"

"I said I would go with you. You said you would try to escape—and I will go with you."

I didn't get it, but she was still talking. She said: "You see, you can't escape. You'll try and that will be exciting, but you can't succeed. It will be very exciting. Aren't you thrilled?"

"Thrilled," I said.

"Come on. We're going to my cave."

"About the air—" I began.

"We talked all we're going to talk about the air. Are you coming or—"

All at once her voice trailed off and her eyes went big and

round. She was staring at a point over my head and behind me, so I turned around and, not seeing anything but the copse of woods—*p h o n e y* woods, she said—I asked, "What is it?"

"I thought I saw something back there. Moving. A man I thought."

"Another man. Look here, Miss Carboy—"

"The least you can do is call me Yvonne if we're going to spend the rest of our lives together here."

"Yvonne, then. If this is some kind of trick—"

"No. I really thought I saw someone. But he's gone now. Well, are you coming?"

I didn't answer her, and she wanted an answer. She wanted one particular kind of answer. She wanted an affirmative answer and she was a reintegrated female ideally equipped to get it, high principles and conscience of one Dick Kendricks or not. All that ideal equipment came into my arms. It didn't breathe, but it didn't matter that it didn't breathe. The ideal equipment was warm and alive and beautiful eyes and soft but firm. The ideal equipment beat down the high moral principles and conscience of one Dick Kendricks,

who—fortunately or otherwise—had been endowed with all the normal, natural impulses.

In short, it started with Yvonne kissing me and although there was nothing tentative and exploratory about her kiss, it ended up with me kissing her. It was a long kiss and when we finished and came apart slowly Yvonne looked at me and smiled and I smiled back and she led me, both of us a little breathless, through the copse of trees which weren't trees.

We were still more breathless when we reached Yvonne's cave, because it had been a pretty steep climb all the way. We plunged inside and it was dim in there but not so dark that you couldn't see. I had no idea where the dim light came from: but then, I had no idea where the light of our New England-Grecian woodlands came from either, since there was no sun in the sky.

Yvonne sat down against a wall of the cave. "Come here and do that again," she said.

I took a step toward her. I didn't want to, at least part of me didn't. But I knew I was going to lose that particular fight and maybe—if Yvonne was right about us spending the rest of our lives here—I

was being unnecessarily gallant about the whole thing, anyway.

And then a voice said:

"Don't touch that girl!"

It was a fitting end to the episode. Because, naturally, that ended it. Whether the voice had substance or not, the spell was broken. There had been something ludicrous about the whole thing, I realized as Yvonne looked at me and I looked at Yvonne and we both looked around the cave, waiting for the voice to speak again. Ludicrous because it all had seemed unreal ever since Yvonne had immersed herself in the stream to prove her point. Ludicrous because she accepted me as matter-of-factly as she accepted the trees which weren't trees or her own dislike of air. And ludicrous because, through it all, the Sagittarians were watching us through pickup units we couldn't see.

"I'm carrying a blaster, Kendricks," the voice said again. I knew the voice suddenly. "I'm coming inside the cave. Turn around and put your hands against the wall."

The voice was Ultoste's.

A moment later I heard his footsteps on the bare rock. I turned around and did what I had been told to do, but I said,

"Yvonne, is he carrying a weapon?"

"Yes. No doubt this is all part of their plan. Isn't it exciting?"

Ultoste muttered a curse which translated very neatly into a string of four-letter Anglo Saxon words in my translator. Then he said, "My first impulse was a foolish one, Kendricks. You may put your hands down. You may turn around."

I got my hands down where they belonged and turned around. Ultoste was standing there in the cave entrance, his gray skin even grayer. Pale, I thought. With fright?

Ultoste was pale with rage. "It isn't your fault," he said. "My first idea was to come in here and—and maybe even blast you, Kendricks. You see, the Sagittarians wanted it that way but although I have been reintegrated as—to use your own term—a zoological procurer, I have not been reintegrated as a specimen. You know what they wanted, of course?"

"Not me," I said.

"Treachery," said Ultoste. "They never intended to pay me. They intended to make a specimen out of me too, after the necessary reintegration. But after they thrust you in

this tight little world of hers with Yvonne, she fully reintegrated and you not reintegrated at all, the thought occurred to them that two of us in here—two human males, one from Vega and one from Earth and neither one properly reintegrated—two of us in here with a fully reintegrated, docile, content Yvonne Carboy, would really be something. Now do you understand?"

"Yes," I said. "So why the quick change?"

"Because—because it would have been exactly what they wanted. For us to fight over the girl. Perhaps it would have proven some obscure point about our cultures to them, I don't know."

I still did not like the way Ultoste had changed his mind, and I said so. He shrugged. "Motives," he told me. "Of what importance are motives now? I'll admit it, Kendricks: if I thought the three of us were doomed to spend the rest of our lives in here, the rest of your life would already have come to an end."

"That's pretty clear and to the point," I said.

"But it doesn't matter, don't you see? We will not spend the rest of our life here. You are bewildered because you re-

gained consciousness within the enclosure. But I know how we can at least reach it, and then—maybe—”

“We can get out,” I said. “All right, Ultoste, an alliance. But once we get out, I guess the alliance is over.”

“But whatever for, Kendricks? I have nothing personal against you. I would only want to kill you if we were forced to remain here, if this place were indeed escape proof.”

“You’re forgetting my job,” I pointed out. “I’m a T.S.S. Agent. We’re after you and I’ve got you and I don’t see any way I can let you get away.”

“That sounds a little stuffy, my friend,” Ultoste said. “Why don’t you wait until we’re back on the other side of the Sagittarian Swarm to worry about that? If we get back.”

I told Ultoste that was fair enough. I said, “You know the way out of this zoo? Then what are we waiting for?”

Yvonne shook her head. “I don’t want to go,” she said.

I looked at Ultoste. Ultoste’s eyes told me that was my problem. I looked at Yvonne. She stared back defiantly.

“Why not?” I said.

“Because I like it here. I want to stay here—with you.”

I looked at Ultoste again. “Even if we escape with her,” I said, “she’ll have to spend the rest of her life under mental care.” I added bleakly, “And there isn’t a thing we can do about that.”

“But there is.”

“Stop talking about me like that,” Yvonne said, smiling her naive smile.

“What can we do about it?” I asked Ultoste.

“We escape. We take one of the Sagittarians with us. We make him perform a second reintegration—”

I looked at Yvonne a third time. “Come on,” I said.

She stuck her tongue out at me but when I took her hand she came outside with me and as we walked along with Ultoste, I wondered about her. She certainly wasn’t feeble-minded. Insane then? It depended on how you wanted to define insanity. She was perfectly oriented to the world the Sagittarians had made for her, so if insanity meant disorientation, she wasn’t insane.

Ultoste and I were insane.

To hell with it, I thought. Say we were insane. So what? We were insane as long as we remained in the Sagittarian zoo because we were badly oriented to our environment. The moment we got outside,

we would be sane again by any standards.

But the moment we got outside, Yvonne would be insane.

"You realize, of course," said Ultoste, "that they're watching us."

I decided Ultoste knew what he was talking about. I also decided there wasn't a thing I could do about it. With Yvonne and the Vegan, I went up a hill and then across a broad greensward and toward a dense copse of trees. If the Sagittarians were watching, they were watching. If they decided to stop us and were at all serious about it, I thought our chances were about as good as a quarter ton turtle making good his escape from the city zoo in Cedar Rapids or someplace just because the cage door was not locked. I did not tell this to Yvonne, because it hardly mattered. Yvonne did not want to escape. Yvonne merely wanted to try to escape. And the reintegrated Ultoste? I wasn't sure about him. But at least he seemed to know where he was going.

"What about the Sagittarians?" I asked as we neared the woods. "Won't they even try to stop us?"

"That depends," Ultoste answered, shrugging. "The Sag-

ittarians are unpredictable. They are also, I might add—" he went on with surprising pedantry — "quite unique. Quite unique, Kendricks."

"Unique how?"

"Well, while they have sentience, the Sagittarians are entirely lacking in soma."

I told him to please put that in two-for-a-quarter words.

"They don't have bodies. They are sentience only, you see. Don't look so startled, Kendricks. Isn't that, after all, the adaptive ultimate of civilization?"

"How the hell should I know?"

"For example, they feed directly on energy. Now, since energy is far more common in the stellar system than matter, they have no food problem. The laws of Malthus, to use your Earthian equivalent of a law which applies all across the galaxy—the laws of Malthus don't apply to the Sagittarians. There is no economic necessity to curtail their population, you see."

"You mean, no bodies at all?"

"Precisely. They are pure energy, you see."

That was a stunner and I said so. "That wrecks it," I told Ultoste. "I had just about decided that the thousand-trans-light ships were a Sag-

itarian invention, not a Vegan. I had decided—"

"But they are!"

"That doesn't make sense. If the Sagittarians are pure energy, why would they need spaceships for locomotion? Energy moves—"

"At a finite speed, Kendricks. At the comparatively slow finite speed of radio or radar or cosmic rays or X-rays or light. And energy, alone, cannot move through subspace. So the Sagittarians need subspace flight exactly as we do. You were right the first time. The ships are theirs. Although, that, of course, poses another problem for them."

"You mean, how does pure energy drive a spaceship?"

"Precisely. And the answer is quite simple. It does not."

"I don't get it."

For the rare pleasure of spaceflight—the Sagittarians are not habitues of deep space, you see—the Sagittarians inhabit robotic bodies. Unfortunately, we'll be seeing some of these robots in a little while."

"They'll try to stop us, you mean?"

"Precisely," Ultoste said again.

"What about the blaster?" I fingered the weapon and looked at Ultoste doubtfully.

"Oh, it will stop them.

They're only metal. But it will hardly stop all of them if they make a concerted effort. Therefore, Kendricks, our escape depends entirely on the whims of the Sagittarians. It's what I've been trying to tell you. If they decide the vicarious experience of our attempted escape is worth their attention, they may allow us to escape. If—"

"But what about all the others at their zoo? Don't they think we'll reveal their secret if we get back? Don't they think—"

Ultoste nodded. "I hadn't thought of that. Then they might permit our escape to a point, but they would want to take us back before we could return through the Swarm to our own section of the galaxy."

I mulled that one over for a moment and said, "But assuming we take one of their spaceships and get clear of World? Could they follow us?"

"They could—but they wouldn't have to."

"Wouldn't have to?"

"They have a sentry in each ship, admittedly powerless while it was in pure energy form, capable only of observing. But let me put it to you as a question. If fugitives escaped, shall we say, on horse-

back, and if horses were available, what would you do?"

"I'd get on a horse and follow them."

"Precisely."

"You mean they'd use some of their robots and take off after us in another spaceship?"

Ultoste shook his head. "Perhaps my analogy was a poor one. Their sentry would, in a manner of speaking, jump on one of the horses."

I shook my head and told Ultoste I didn't get it.

"The sentry would use one of us, inside the spaceship, exactly as they use their robots. Now do you see?" And, before I could tell him that I did: "But it doesn't matter, Kendricks. Not yet. We have a long way to go—before we even *see* a spaceship."

We were deep within the woods now. I was holding Yvonne's hand and every now and then she'd smile at me. It was a conspiratorial smile, but it belonged more on the face of a girl about to stick her hand in the cooky jar than on the face of a female espionage operative. It became more and more obvious as we left Yvonne's cave behind us that her behavior was reasonably integrated and adult only in the circumscribed environment the Sagittarians had

carefully planned for her. From now until she could somehow be reintegrated—if ever—her behavior would become increasingly infantile. It briefly entered my mind that it might be better, after all, to leave Yvonne here where she'd be happy. I frowned. That was a personal judgment, and I had no business making personal judgments. My job was to get Yvonne back safely to Fairworld and her father, and there was no room for personal judgments in anything I did.

We got out of the woods and suddenly found ourselves on a gravel-topped road. A bare sun-scorched desert stretched out flat and parched on the other side of the road.

"You mean we're out of the cage?" I asked Ultoste.

"If you can call it a cage. What did you expect, bars?"

"No. A forcefield."

"There's a forcefield, believe me. We haven't quite reached it. It extends down the center of the road like a highway divider. But we could go right through it if we wished."

I stared across the road. A forcefield was invisible, of course, and so I saw nothing. "You better explain that," I said.

"The forcefield serves mere-

ly to keep the oxygen in—for you. You were to share Yvonne's little corner of paradise, you remember. You'd be committing suicide to step through the forcefield, since you breathe. The same applies to me. Yvonne, of course, being reintegrated, would have no desire to step across the forcefield."

"That's just great," I said.
"So what do we do?"

Ultoste shrugged. "I told you we were a long way from any spaceship."

We went up the road in silence. I knew now that the Sagittarians—the invisible, bodiless Sagittarians—were watching us. And laughing, maybe. If bodiless creatures could laugh. Because on the other side of the invisible forcefield was death for me and death for Ultoste and life only for Yvonne, who didn't care to escape, thank you.

"Yvonne," I said. "Listen...."

"This is fun," she admitted, "a lot of fun." She smiled brightly. Small child smile. Cooky-taking smile. "I didn't know it would be so much fun, know it?"

"Yeah," I said.

"After they catch us, can we try and escape again? Can we?"

Ultoste gave me a hopeless gesture. I looked across the road again. I blinked. Just beyond dead center—where a highway divider would have been—something had materialized. It was a little wheeled cart.

Upon the cart were two spacesuits.

I pointed, wordless. I knew what the mouse felt like when the cat had him cornered. And was playing.

"Why not?" Ultoste asked philosophically. "To whet our appetites. This is, after all, a zoo. Call it playing with us or experimenting. They want to taunt us. Perhaps even now with instruments we cannot see they are measuring our thalamic responses. Can't you imagine their questions: do we have a threshold of frustration? will we turn on one another? will we make a desperate attempt to rush out into that vacuum and secure the spacesuits?"

"Why not?" I demanded.
"Why couldn't we do that?"

"Look on the other side of the road."

"A desert. So what?"

"A particular kind of desert. It's a reproduction of Altair's third planet, for the Altairian captives, naturally."

"Altair. I remember something peculiar."

"The planet is spongy and incredibly light-weight, its core like a series of interlocking bubbles. It has very little weight. Instead of the fifteen pounds of pressure to a square inch which you feel on Earth because the atmosphere has a certain density and a certain height and the center of the Earth exerts a certain gravitational pull on it—instead of that, atmosphereless Altair III has zero pounds per square inch of atmospheric pressure and almost no pull of gravity. Across the center of the road, those features are reproduced exactly. So, Kendricks, if you went out there even for a second—"

"You'd burst," I finished for him quickly. Then I added suddenly: "What about Yvonne?"

"She'd be perfectly safe. There was no air in her 'cage' until you came. No air, no atmospheric pressure."

"But how can a human body, any human body, withstand environments instantly lethal to its physiology?"

Ultoste offered me a smile. "Who said anything about physiological changes?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"The mind, Kendricks. Mind over matter. Cerebral mastery of somatic function.

Can you deny it when you see its fruits? On your planet do they not have fakirs and mystics and ascetics who can walk on beds of hot coals and sleep on spikes and go weeks with no food without feeling discomfort?"

"Yes, but—"

"Mind over matter, Kendricks. Take it a step further, take it to where the Sagittarians have taken it. Reintegration makes it possible for a girl like Yvonne to cast aside the shell of her physiological limitations. If, indeed, the mind could suspend the metabolic functions of the body on the cellular level, would breathing be necessary?"

I shook my head. It would not be necessary.

"And Yvonne," Ultoste told me, "is the living proof of this."

I shrugged. "Yvonne is also our passport," I said. "If she'll help."

"You propose to send her for the spacesuits?"

"If she will go."

I looked at the little cart again. It had been set there by unseen hands, by the invisible energy beings of Sagittarius. I could reach it in less than half a dozen strides—and die trying. Yvonne? She could retrieve the spacesuits for us as

if the forcefield and the vacuum and near-weightlessness beyond it did not exist. If she wanted to. If she could somehow get that silly, infantile smile off her face. If. About a million ifs between us and subspace—and freedom. Because after Yvonne and the spacesuits there would be the Sagittarian robots, and after the robots there would be the energy sentry aboard the spaceship, if we found a spaceship, and after the sentry who knew what?

"You're having fun, Yvonne?" I asked softly.

"Oh, yes. Just lots and lots."

"And you'd like to go on having fun?"

"Goodness, yes!"

"Like trying to escape?"

"Yes. Isn't it fun?"

"We've gone as far as we can go," I said.

Yvonne looked at me. She got quite serious for a moment and stuck her tongue out. "Meanie!" she said.

"Unless you want to do something for us," I told her.

"You mean we could play we're escaping again and sneak around on tiptoe and everything?"

"If you do something for us, yes."

"Ask me anything," Yvonne cried.

"See those spacesuits? Get them. Bring them to us."

Yvonne looked at the spacesuits. She looked at me. I tried to pull back my figurative eye-stalks, but it was too late.

"Boy, you're practically drooling at the mouth," Yvonne said. "What's so extra special about those spacesuits?"

"They're extra special," I said in the voice of a supplicant, "because unless we have them we can't go on playing we're escaping anymore. You like to play, don't you?"

"Just lots and lots," Yvonne said again.

"Ten you'll get the spacesuits for us."

"Well," Yvonne said.

"You'll get them?"

"I'm not supposed to. I'm not supposed to help you escape! I just know I'm not."

"It's the only way we can play the game."

Yvonne oggled me suddenly. "You mean otherwise we'll have to go back to the cave and play that other game we were starting to play before? That's not so bad."

I looked at Ernest Carboy's daughter. Full-grown woman. Delightfully full-grown. With the reintegrated mind of an infant. I sighed and said, "We won't play, Yvonne. We won't

play anything unless you get the spacesuits. You understand?"

She went through the tongue-sticking and meanie routine again. Beautiful Yvonne Carboy. Necessary Yvonne Carboy. Infantile Yvonne. Girl who didn't breathe....

"Well," she said for the second time. This was a game for her too. She stared at Ultoste. "You know something?" she said. "I don't like him. Tell him to go away and I'll do it." She gave me an impish smile and added, "Maybe."

I jerked a thumb at Ultoste. Shrugging, he walked off into the woods and had soon disappeared.

"Now kiss me," Yvonne said. She shut her eyes and her red lips made a pretty pout.

I moved her chin with my fingers and kissed her lightly on the cheek. The pretty pout became a sulky pout as the face registered disappointment. "Aw," she said.

"The spacesuits," I said.

"Aw," she said again, and trudged out toward the center of the road and through the forcefield we couldn't see.

She reached the cart and turned around to look at me. Smiling, she gave the cart a playful shove. In the all-but-

weightless world on the other side of the forcefield, the cart went streaking down the road. Desperately I sprinted after it on my side of the forcefield while Yvonne took seven-league strides in the adjacent, weightless environment. I drew up huffing and panting and Yvonne said something but I heard nothing because there was no air on her side of the forcefield to conduct the sound. Her lips moved again and then she smiled. She took the spacesuits from the cart and slung them bulkily over her arms and came back toward me. And through the forcefield. Where she promptly fell in a heap because weightlessness was abruptly gone and those spacesuits were heavy.

"Now can we play some more?" Yvonne asked me with an innocent little-girl smile.

I nodded happily. Ultoste came trotting out of the woods and Yvonne showed us her sulky pout again, maintaining moody silence while Ultoste and I climbed into our spacesuits. Then with Yvonne we crossed the unseen forcefield which was strong enough to hold in air but so weak we hardly felt it at all as we went through.

And, down the road, a spaceship materialized.

Materialized. . . .

"Now hold on!" I shouted, my voice reverberating brassily in my own intersuit earphones. "What is this, some kind of a game? First they practically hand us the suits, then—"

"Precisely," said Ultoste. "Some kind of a game. Because the Sagittarians enjoy our antics, enjoy the antics of all flesh creatures. Why do you think they went to all the trouble of converting their planet into a glorified zoo?"

I didn't answer him. The sudden appearance of the spaceship on the road ahead was answer enough. A game?

Or maybe an experiment, like seeing how long it took the laboratory mouse to run through the maze.

I gripped Yvonne's hand in the metaloid gauntlet of my spacesuit and walked down the road to where the spaceship, sitting on its blasting tubes and pointing up at the sky, was waiting for us.

When we were halfway there, the robots appeared.

Although robot is the wrong word if by robot you mean manlike creatures of metal. Because these were cylindrical in shape and instead of walking they locomoted themselves by rolling forward on huge

ball-bearings where the hip-sockets might have been if you considered the cylinders as torsos.

They came rolling toward us. There were five of them, each with a long thin rapier-like extension at its upper end.

Ideal for ripping spacesuits.

I was hardly aware of reaching for it, but all at once I had Ultoste's blaster in my hand. I wondered if the game and/or experiment nature of our attempt at freedom would terminate on the destruction of any of the metal creatures. I shrugged. Their destruction—or our death if they got to use the rapiers on us.

They spread out, one making straight for us and two flanking us on the right and two on the left. I fired the blaster and saw the metal skin of the single cylinder in front of us go cherry red, then white. Then it began to drip and the metal creature came to a halt. A permanent halt. What remained of it was hardly more than a heap of slag, but before I could congratulate myself, Yvonne screamed.

One of the flanking creatures was almost upon her. I lunged to one side to get Yvonne out of the line of fire, dropping to one knee and firing as I did so.

The robot collapsed and went molten no more than a yard from Yvonne, its deadly beak all but resting on her bare feet. Then Ultoste came rushing into my field of vision—a fifty degree arc in the spacesuit helmet—and out of it again. One of the robots was after him and with Ultoste's lead diminishing every second, there was no question about who would win that race.

I brought down the third robot and called in the intercom for Ultoste to keep going. He was heading in the direction of the spaceship and I gave Yvonne a shove and sent her sprinting after him.

I went more slowly, turning constantly because my field of vision was limited. The robots who had flanked us on the right apparently had disappeared. Unless they were behind me—

I whirled, and heard Yvonne scream again.

Turning in her direction, I began to run. The cylinders had doubled back to the spaceship and were waiting for Yvonne and the Vegan. I fired the blaster on the run and succeeded only in turning a prow section of the spaceship red hot. Then I held my fire as Ultoste thundered back toward me with Yvonne close

on his heels and the two attacking cylinders behind them.

Yvonne stumbled and fell and one of the cylinders pulled up short. It was silhouetted for a moment against the dark, airless sky, and I fired a blaster. I knew I had hit it and I did not wait for the result. Instead I sought Ultoste with my fifty degree range of vision.

But the fifth cylinder, leaving the weaponless Vegan, turned on me. It seemed to know all about the limited range of vision, too, because I did not see it almost until it was too late. When I did, I brought the blaster up purely by instinct and fired it without aiming. I side-stepped the lunging beak of the cylinder and watched it hit the surface of the road and bounce and lay still with a growing pool of molten metal beneath it.

I walked to the spaceship, where Yvonne and Ultoste had already opened the airlock. As I reached it Yvonne was just coming out and I heard Ultoste cry over the intercom:

"Stop her!"

Yvonne came running right into my arms. When I caught her, her mouth opened as if she were whimpering or

screaming. Naturally, there was no sound. She kicked and struggled, but I bore her back into the spaceship and got my helmet off as Ultoste slammed and fastened the inner airlock door.

"I don't want to escape really!" Yvonne wailed. "I only want to make believe. It was fun to make believe. Please let me go back. Oh, please. . . ."

"Course for the Swarm?" asked Ultoste, who was seated at the control panel.

"For the Swarm," I repeated his words while he punched the orbit out on the computer. "Listen, Yvonne," I said. "We can cure you. If you'll only wait, and trust me."

"I don't want to wait or trust you or anything. I only want to go back home." But home, of course, was not Fairworld or Earth. Home was a cave here on the single world beyond Sagittarius.

"Maybe you don't have to wait," Ultoste called from the control board.

"I don't get you."

"Sagittarians usually stock these ships with the lethe drug, that's what I mean."

"But you wouldn't know how to administer it. Would you?"

"Yes, but you wouldn't

know how to pilot one of these thousand-trans-light ships, and I would. You'll have to administer the drug if anyone's going to. Of course, Kendricks, you can wait until we pass beyond the Swarm—but the longer you wait, the less chance there would be for a complete cure. Don't forget, Yvonne Carboy has been reintegrated not merely mentally, but physiologically as well. That is, cerebral reintegration to affect somatic function."

So, while Ultoste waited for the computer to drop our orbit out of its slot, I went looking for the lethe drug. I found the clear yellow liquid in several vials in the storeroom. I held it in my hand, up to the light. I looked at it. Did I dare to use it on Yvonne? I remembered Ultoste's words. Did I dare not to?

Before I could decide, Ultoste told us to fasten ourselves in the aft blasting bunks. Yvonne was docile enough: the securing straps were a new experience for her reintegrated personality.

Seconds later we blasted off the world which the Sagittarians had named World not so much out of ethnocentrism as because it was the only astronomical body on its own side of the Sagittarian Swarm. As if,

I remembered thinking as the stresses of blastoff brought me to the threshold of unconsciousness, the Swarm served as a curtain to hide the Sagittarian world from the rest of the galaxy. And, it suddenly occurred to me, we had never seen the Sagittarians, had even forgotten all about the Sagittarian sentry who was probably aboard this very spaceship with us. . . .

Then the G's mounted and I lost consciousness.

"Pulse?" Ultoste asked hours later.

"Normal."

"Respiration?"

"All right, I think. I'm no doctor."

We were now in the midst of the Sagittarian Swarm, where a million dazzling stars lit up the firmament. As far as we knew, we had not been followed. Ultoste had put the spaceship on its radar pilot and together we were administering lethe drug to Yvonne Carboy.

"Another vial, please," Ultoste said.

I gave it to him and he prepared to attach a hypodermic needle to it. "This should do it," he told me. "This should reverse the reintegration. You see, Kendricks, five vials is maximum dose and—with the pseudo-physiological changes

which have occurred in the girl, one must assume that a maximum dose has been administered."

"So we counter it with five vials of our own?"

"Precisely. There is only one direction in which change can now occur. Theoretically at least, Yvonne Carboy should return to herself."

I watched him. The Vegan stood there, studying the vial, seemingly lost in thought. "Go ahead and give it to her," I said.

"What was that? What did you say?"

"Give her the lethe. Go ahead."

Ultoste suddenly staggered back away from us. I reached out and clutched at the vial of lethe, grabbing it before he could drop it. He righted himself, clinging groggily to a stanchion.

"What is it?" I said.

"Headache. Severe . . . headache. You . . . administer the drug yourself."

I nodded. "Then we'd better see about you," I said. I gave Yvonne the hypodermic and told myself that was that. Yvonne was now in a deep comatose state and would—theoretically—awake from it as an un-reintegrated Yvonne Carboy once more. Provided we had made no mistakes.

A mistake could mean anything, but the longer Yvonne waited, the less her chance of return to complete normality would have been. Ultoste and I had no choice.

As I turned away from the bunk on which Yvonne was resting, the spaceship lurched, throwing me against the wall. "Were you dodging meteors?" I asked.

Ultoste, who was seated at the controls, did not answer.

"You'd better let me take over," I said. "After that headache of yours."

"No. That's perfectly all right."

"Go ahead," I urged. "Get some sleep, why don't you?"

"I said I'm all right," Ultoste snapped. "I'm feeling fine."

"Well, don't snap my head off."

"The headache vanished."

Before I could answer, or try to fathom Ultoste's peculiar behavior, the ship lurched again. I moved toward the controls and looked over Ultoste's shoulder.

"What happened to our course?" I demanded, startled. Because the instrument panel showed me that we were some thirty degrees off course and still swinging in a wide arc.

"I don't know what you're

talking about!" Ultoste said hotly.

"Let me at those controls—"

For answer, Ultoste got up suddenly and whirled on me. He was holding the blaster. "Keep away," he said. "Stay back near the girl and you won't get hurt."

"It's the kidnapping charge," I said, trying to think. "Isn't it?" Ultoste would be desperate, I told myself. I should have been prepared for something like this. Once we returned to Fairworld, Ultoste would have no less than fifty-seven charges of kidnapping to face on a few dozen worlds. Pretty obviously, our truce had come to an end.

"Kidnapping charge?" said Ultoste.

"You don't think you can get away, do you? Hide somewhere? They'll track you down. There isn't a place in the known galaxy—"

"We're going back to World," Ultoste said quietly.

I hadn't moved. I was right in front of him. Right in front of the blaster he held.

"World?" I said. "But you—they tricked you! They—"

Ultoste shook his head. "You're forgetting the sentry, aren't you?"

The sentry. Yes, I had forgotten the sentry.

"A marriage between a Sagittarian and a flesh creature," Ultoste said pedantically, "is both symbiotic and permanent. Symbiotic because the Sagittarian can show me new heights of cerebral experience while I can give it the benefit of thalamic responses by a physical creature to its physical environment. Permanent because once the Sagittarian has wedded itself to my mind, which it has done, there is no separation short of death for both myself and the Sagittarian. No, Kendricks. Keep back. You can't afford to try anything, don't you see? I can kill you here. We don't need you. The Sagittarians did not contract for you, only for the one Earthgirl. You were never more than a bonus."

He was taking us back to World, I thought bleakly. Our first escape had been engineered largely because the Sagittarians had taken either a sporting or a scientific interest in it.

There could be no second escape.

When the spaceship lurched again, swinging wider on its arc, I hurled myself at Ultoste. It was a desperation move and it startled him. He fired the

blaster high and wide and its beam seared the wall of the control cabin at a point which corresponded with the exterior damage I had done earlier.

The spaceship lurched more wildly this time, spinning and tossing Ultoste and me around from bulkhead to bulkhead. He fired again, missing. Then I caught his leg as we were flung together and he kicked out with the metal boot and I felt my head jerked back savagely.

Ultoste stood poised on one foot, to stamp on my face with the heavy boot. I grabbed his foot and twisted. He yelled. The ship lurched again, then abruptly straightened as a Swarm world caught it in the net of its field of gravity.

Stunned as his head struck a stanchion, Ultoste fell and lay still. I rushed to the radio as the G's mounted. It was like struggling through thick, burning syrup in agonizing slow motion. . . . I heard the shriek of air outside as the ship entered the unknown world's atmosphere, heard Yvonne whimper from the blastoff bunk. . . .

"Hello!" I called into the radio. "Terrestrial Special Services agent Richard Kendricks calling, T.S.S. Agent

Kendricks calling. Urgent!" I looked at the instrument panel and gave our space co-ordinates within the Swarm. "Crashing on unknown planet. Urgent. Urgent. Do you read us?"

There was a squawking of radio noise, but no response. I sent the message again.

Ultoste and his resident Sagittarian regained consciousness. He leaped on my back.

The spaceship gained speed once more, gravity slowing my muscles as I battled Ultoste, air whining outside as atmospheric friction tore at the spaceship.

I found Ultoste's mouth and got the fingers of one hand inside his lips.

He let go of me and I gulped in air and used the edge of my hand against his Adam's apple as he came at me cursing. He staggered back and fell slowly, slowly, as in a dream. . . .

I whirled to battle the controls again and had time only to pull the gravity-fast forward rocket lever once before we struck. . . .

There was a brief period of nothingness and then a dim memory of struggling to my feet and seeing Ultoste, his head shattered, his skull smashed and pulpy against the base of the pilot chair,

where multiple G's had thrust it, of struggling back toward where Yvonne was waiting, still unconscious, in her blast hammock, of unfastening her and carrying her, of remembering what it was important to remember in a spacewreck, that the atomic fuel, unstable at best, is completely unpredictable after a crash. . . .

And then, hardly remembering the steps I had taken, I was outside with Yvonne in my arms.

I was still running with Yvonne when the spaceship blew up behind us.

This time it was Yvonne who regained consciousness first.

"Are you all right?" she said. "I—I'm afraid I don't know you."

"I'm all right. What do you remember, Yvonne?"

"A party. I was at a party with—with a Vegan named Ultoste. That's the last thing I remember."

"Take a deep breath."

She did so.

"Now let it out," I said, and, when she had done so: "You're going to be all right."

"Of course I'm going to be all right. Mind telling me where we are—and who *you* are?"

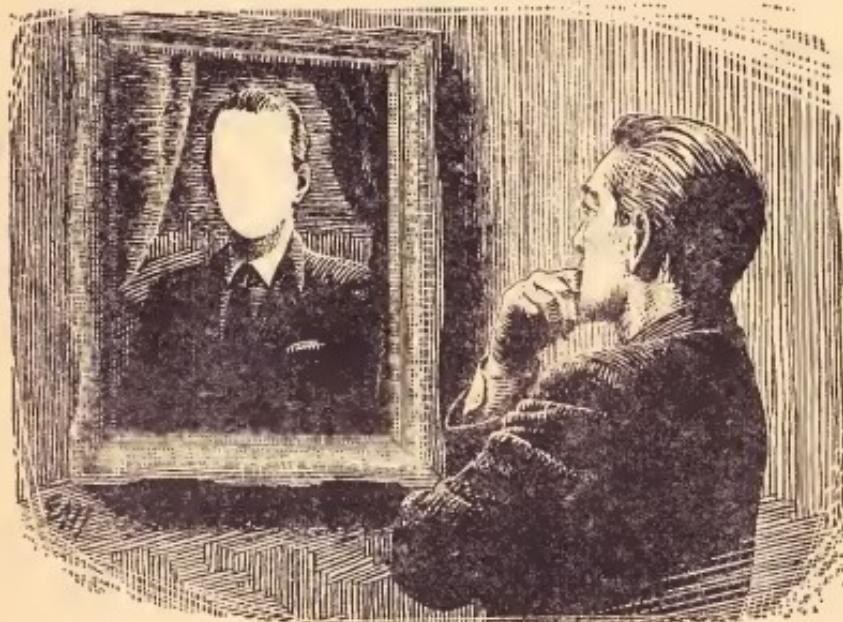
"That, Yvonne, is a long story," I said, smiling.

THE END

UNCLE KIM

By EDMOND WARREN

He was in love with his wife and there was nothing to mar their happiness; nothing but a vague and faceless man he had never met but who was always with them.



DELLA LAMONT was scrambling eggs. Not a difficult thing, surely. Yet she was acting as though her life depended upon it. Eric Lamont held peculiar notions about scrambled eggs. They weren't to be done too hard or soft, which meant a concentrated watching by Della.

Eric smacked his lips over the cold orange juice. "Good! So cold. Think we'll be able to afford an air-conditioner some day, Del?"

"Unh hunh . . ."

". . . Or a car? Be nice to get away from this oven of a Manhattan. Hey! How's about the eggs, kitten?"

"Coming, pet. Coffee's about done, too."

They ate breakfast in a silence broken only by Eric's comments on the antics of his favorite ball team, the Chicago White Sox. Presently Eric looked away from the *Times* to stare at his wife. She seemed oddly occupied with something on the rim of the cup held almost on a level with her eyes. "Fly in the coffee . . . ?"

"Fly . . ." She looked blank. "Oh, No, I was just thinking."

"No! You look so different when you're thinking. Anything personal?"

"Kinda. How long have we been married, Eric?"

This time he was the one to look blank. "A year and four months and two weeks and three days. Give me a couple of minutes and I'll break it down to the hour."

She blew him a kiss. "I was just thinking how happy I've been."

"Well, don't make it sound like it's going to end any day now." He was smiling. Suddenly the smile went away. His eyes narrowed slightly. It gave him a hard look. "Look, Del, you're not going to give me the Uncle Kim business."

"I can't help it. All day yesterday at work . . . Mr. Sims kept asking if anything was

wrong. I have the feeling that any day Uncle Kim will drop in on us."

He spoke quietly, as though to a child: "Del. We're at breakfast, Saturday morning. There's a whole bright day ahead of us to do with as we want. Central Park, or Coney Island, or a walk on Fifth Ave., or anything we'd care to do. You and I and to hell with the world and to hell with your Uncle Kim. I don't want to hear about him. Not this morning, and to tell you the truth, not any time."

"Eric! . . ."

"Don't Eric me. Uncle Kim's gonna be here some day. So what? Do I stop living? Good Lord, Della. You're like . . . Look! So say he doesn't like me, and doesn't leave you his money . . ."

"I didn't say he was going to leave me his money."

"No! But you sure in heck act like he will. That is if he likes me." He paused for a long-drawn breath. "Ah, let's drop it, Del," he said wearily.

"Yes," she said, "let's have breakfast. And you'll tell me about your White Sox, and how Mr. Anderson took that golf customer away from you and made you lose your commission. Or let's talk about Marilyn Monroe; how well

she's stacked. That's more to your liking. Or how you'd like to have a car, but we can't afford one, can we . . . ? go on; tell me how much you enjoy two weeks at the Cape. But it's so damned expensive, so we'd better not, this year. Next year . . . well, we'll see."

"Why don't you cut it out!"

For a few seconds they stared at each other in silence, something like hatred in their eyes. Suddenly she was crying, without show, just tears slipping out, falling, and making spots on the yellow imitation bamboo place mat.

He drew back from the table, ran around to her and pulled her away from the table and held her close to him, stroking her hair gently. "Don't, honey. Please . . . "

"I—I'm sorry, Eric," she said. She gulped, sniffed loudly a couple of times. "I didn't mean to cry."

"Sure, you're a big girl. Hey!" He cupped her chin with his palm, tilted her face up. He was smiling but the smile could not hide the faint tremble of a muscle in his jaw. "The eggs. They'll get cold."

"That's the kind of brute you are," she said. "I slave over a hot stove for you, and you let the eggs get cold."

He laughed, gave her a quick pinch and started back

to his chair. "Isn't that the reason you married me?" he asked. "For the brute in me?"

They were doing the breakfast dishes when Della got the idea. "A picnic. I want to go on a picnic. Let's, Eric. Central Park. The Zoo; those silly monkeys. We'll make faces at them, and throw peanuts at the elephant, and I'll let the lions and tigers frighten me. You'll hold me then, won't you Eric?" She didn't wait for his answer. "I'll pack some sandwiches. And afterwards we'll walk down Fifth Ave., and you'll show me the dresses you'd love to see me in. We'll sit under a tree in the park . . . "

"Okay, hon." He threw his hands up in resignation. "I'm sold. It's a solid idea. I go for it. We'll have dinner out and maybe see a show. 'Marty' maybe, hunh?"

" . . . And you'll make love to me. Like the first time we went to Central Park," she went on.

He thought back. "That was love? We just held hands."

"And kissed," she said. "Your hands and your lips and your eyes telling me how much you loved me. That was all."

He was putting a plate in the cupboard. He turned his head for a long moment to

look at her. "It was like that, wasn't it? Nothing big. Like the first time I saw you on the Lexington Express. You holding a strap, and me beside you. And all of a sudden there wasn't anyone else in the whole world. Just you. Let me remember again." His eyes probed the past. "Your hand, that was the first I noticed about you. I had never seen such slim fingers. Then your eyes, so dark, so mysterious. And the tallness of you, as tall as I."

She teased him: "Nothing else, dear?"

"Not then. But you didn't take long to make me notice the rest."

"I was a brazen woman in those days, wasn't I, Eric?"

"And since when have you stopped being that?"

"Never going to stop being one. Only way to hold a man. Ask Miss Monroe."

"Man! That's all I'd have to do, discuss you with all that stuff next to me."

This time it was she who did the pinching.

Della became mysteriously busy while Eric was shaving. He came back into the living room to find her polishing the frame of a nine-by-fourteen inch painting. He had seen it once before, the day they had

moved into the apartment. It had been the cause of their first argument, and Della had put it well back in a closet. It was a painting of Uncle Kim. Just the head.

He studied the portrait while Della hung it. A lean ascetic face. The face of a scholar, or judge, or even, as Eric suddenly thought, the face of a martyr. A little too harsh in the mouth, too lean in the jaw, too cold in the eyes. Yes, he could understand Della's worry. Uncle Kim would think long and hard and coldly about to whom he'd will his money.

She turned, saw him staring.

He winked at her. "If we're agoing picnicking, let's git," he said.

It had been a good idea, the picnic.

But several million other New Yorkers had the same idea.

Central Park held more people than trees. The animals in the Zoo moved fretfully across the few yards of freedom between their bars. Even the monkeys, whom Della loved to watch, huddled sulking in shady corners. The heat was unbearable. Not a blade of grass stirred, not a leaf moved.

Eric tried to find a bench in

the shade or even a spot beneath a tree. Nothing. The sandwiches in the brown paper bag became soggy. The mayonnaise Della had spread on the bread soaked through and made large spots on the bag.

Eric stopped suddenly beside a wire refuse container. He lifted the bag, held it for an instant over the container, then dropped it. "Look, Del," he turned to her. "This doesn't make sense. It was a good idea. But you weren't alone. There's an air-conditioned Schrafft's over on Fifty-seventh and Third Ave., right next to the Sutton Theatre. We'll grab a cab, have our lunch there, then take in 'Marty'. Don't you think that would be better than this?"

"Anything, Eric, anything. Only let's get out of this place."

It was Eric who brought up the subject of Uncle Kim again. He was making a big production of eating his dessert. It wasn't like him. He was usually a quick eater. Della knew every mood, and waited patiently for him to talk.

"Honey . . ."

"Unh hunh . . ."

"Think maybe I've been pretty jerky about Uncle Kim, don't you?"

She didn't answer.

"Can't say I blame you," he said. "Lord knows you haven't brought up any of your other relatives. Just the one old guy. Matter-of-fact," he let the dessert spoon come carefully to rest on the saucer, "you've never talked about any of them. Or much about him. Just that you want him to like me."

"I do. So very much."

"Okay, hon. If it means so much to you then it means that much to me. I promise to do anything and everything to make him like me."

"He will, Eric. I know he will. He's very strict, but very fair, too. It's so important that he understands."

"Understands what?"

"Oh . . ." she made a vague gesture with her hand.

"Don't be so mysterious. Understands what?"

"I can't explain. You'll know after you meet him."

"Okay, Del. I hope he doesn't expect too much of me. I'm no genius, even if you seem to think I am. Just a working stiff trying to make a living selling sporting goods. Not that there isn't a good buck in it. But I'll never be a millionaire. Or even a rich man. All I want to do is be able to give us a happy life."

"And that's what I think

Uncle Kim will see and understand. Being happy is very important to him. Now how about finishing your dessert and let's get to the show before the mob starts lining up?"

"Right, boss."

They held hands all through the picture. Coming out into the street they noticed the darkness of the sky. Storm clouds were piled thick across the horizon. Eric whistled a cab up to the curb. By the time they reached Jackson Heights the rain was pounding the streets in torrents.

"One thing we can be sure of," Eric said as he pressed the elevator button. "Uncle Kim won't come visiting this night."

Della opened the apartment door. The air was thick and hot. "I'll open some windows," she said as she started through the small foyer. It's turned so much cool . . . Uncle Kim!"

Eric followed her with quick steps. He let a smile

come to his lips. Della was standing beside Uncle Kim. They were in the center of the living room. Eric paused for a second.

Della said: "This is my husband Eric . . ."

Uncle Kim turned to face Eric. He gave him a long probing look, then pulled his right hand out of his pocket.

And shot him dead with the pistol he had in his hand!

"No!" Della moaned softly. She covered her face with her hands and fell against Uncle Kim. "Why . . .? I loved him. He was my husband. And I wanted you to love him, too. Why . . . why did you have to? . . ."

Uncle Kim patted her shoulders. "I know you wanted me to like him. And learning to know him I might have. I had no choice; then. It is the unwritten law, my dear.

"No Martian woman can marry any other but a Martian. Come, let us go . . ."

THE END

ATTENTION FANZINE EDITORS:

- If you would like to have your fanzine reviewed, send a copy to Roger DeSoto, Amazing Stories, 366 Madison Avenue, New York 17, New York.
- *The Revolving Fan* does not appear in this issue because too few fanzines have been submitted.

THE SCARLET SAINT

By MANLY BANISTER

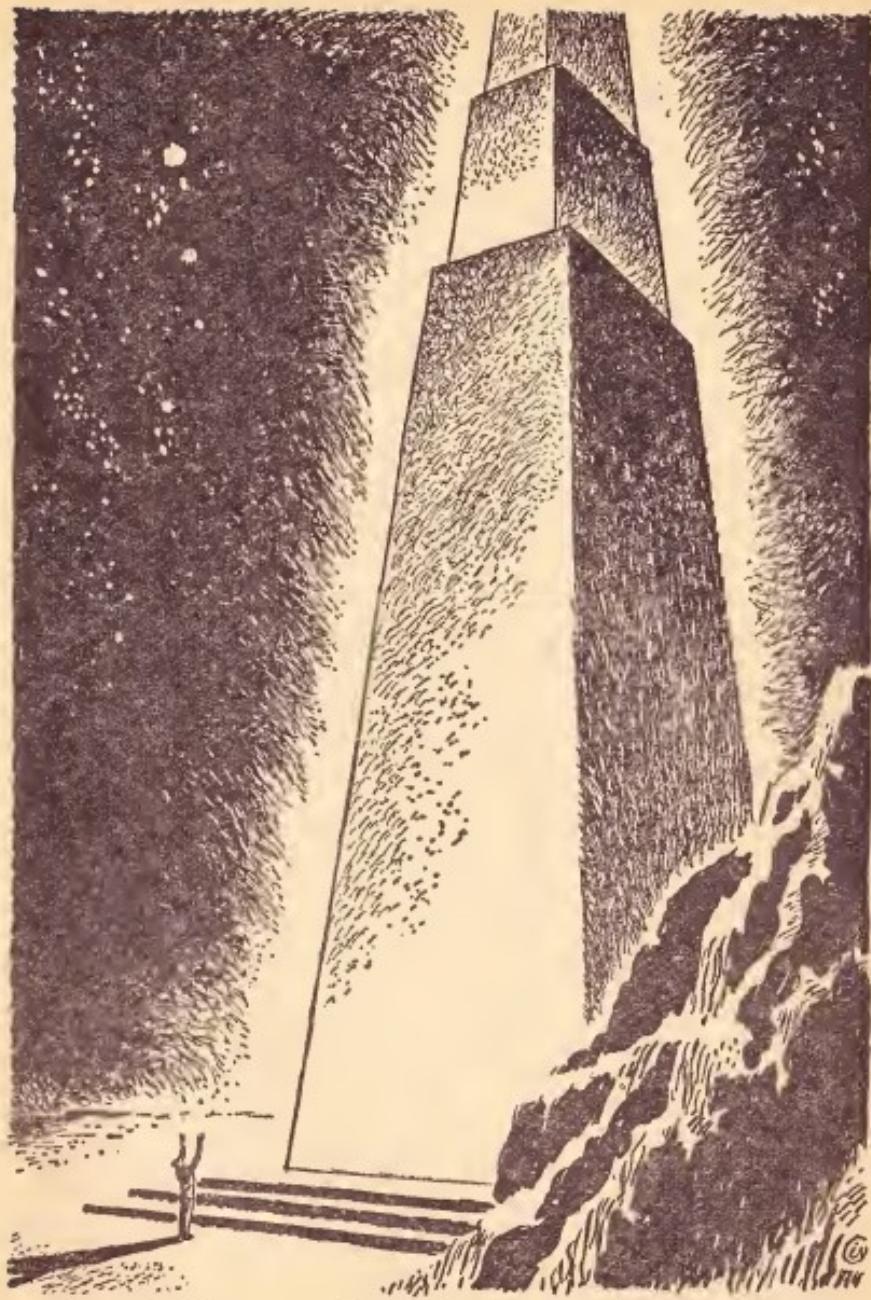
Kor had passed test after test in his life-long battle against oblivion. But each time a new and greater test faced him, and now he awaited the most terrible of all. This is the final installment of a serial that will remain long in your memory.

CHAPTER XVIII

ELDRA was a model of efficiency at cave-keeping. She kept their quarters clean, was alert to every move that Kor made. During the long evenings, she fed the fire and talked to him, sang to him, until gradually her words began to have meaning for Kor. He was learning the simple language of the people of Go.

There was sickness among the tribe that winter, and Kor healed them. When food ran low, he lured a great, slow-moving, fur-covered beast into the canyon for the hunters to slay.

The weather never grew so cold that the tribespeople would not gather at Kor's cave for morning worship. Kor seldom went out, now that Eldra could go in his place. He preferred to sleep, or think. Eldra spoke to the people about their god, described his ways, told them the things which Kor told her in his halting speech. These were incoherent snatches of Kor's fleeting memory, interludes that he remembered, then remembered not, forgotten bits that drifted ghost-like through his mind, which he recited for Eldra's pleasure, then forgot again.



He stood with arms upraised, a lone figure against the universe.

There was one of whom Kor had spoken in fragments, arousing Eldra's jealousy. He called her Soma, and Eldra believed she was a goddess Kor had left behind when he came down from heaven to live among the thurb. She knew he had come from heaven because once, when she had asked him whence he came, Kor had pointed to the stars and had said, slowly: "Far, far away. Up there."

Eldra visualized Soma as an evil goddess whom Kor had loved. To punish him for some fancied slight, Soma had cast Kor out of their heavenly home, causing him to lose his memory. Eldra hated the goddess Soma. She built her into an image of evil and told the wondering cave men sheer fabrications of a heavenly struggle among the gods. She told them that the forces of evil, led by the wicked goddess Soma, had conquered the good god Kor and had cast him out. But, she assured them, with the help of the thurb, as evidenced in their proper worship of him, Kor would again one day mount to his rightful place among the stars, and he would lift up the thurb and make of them a mighty nation wielding great power in the world.

Eldra became the first high

priestess to hold office on the world of Karel VI.

When the last snows melted in the spring, Eldra was already big with child. Kor left his cave and went up the rocky path to the forested plateau above. He had found a pleasant glade there, bright with the first blossoms of spring. In it he would sit for hours and meditate in silence.

His conversations with Eldra during the winter had tapped the hidden store of his memory, but no piece could be fitted to another to make sense. Who was Soma? He dreamed of a lovely face with sparkling, sea-green eyes. Whence came this vision? Was this Soma, whom Eldra called the wicked goddess? Why did the vision both delight and trouble him? Perhaps Soma was some sprite of his imagination, whose beauty charmed him. He stared at the ground, seeing her there in his mind's eye. Electrons streamed in whorls of ecstasy through his consciousness. Bright motes of sparkling luminescence swirled around him in the glade, glinted against the background of somber conifers, of leafing underbrush. The swarms of brilliant sparkles cascaded between his palms, a leaping torrent of living flame, and disappeared in-

to a shapeless bulk that seemed to grow on the turf at his feet. At last the sparkling motes dimmed and died. Kor looked at what he had wrought. The woman was beautiful, her unclad body disposed upon the grass as if she slept. Kor's heart leaped. She was Soma! From somewhere, his nighted memory had dredged up the matrix for her creation. A sob caught in Kor's throat.

"Soma!"

She seemed about to awaken and spring into flight. A tender smile curved her lips.

"Soma!"

She did not move. Kor touched her. The flesh was cold. Soma was dead.

Kor wept. He destroyed the image and builded again. He could not make her live. Each time he tried, Soma's body returned as preciously perfect as the dream that inspired her. Each time she was dead, and Kor destroyed her.

Kor became preoccupied with his problem of creation. He ignored Eldra, refusing to speak to her. Sometimes he passed days and nights alone in the glade. He forbade Eldra to approach him there, and laid upon her the duty of guarding the path up the cliff, that none of the Go might

climb up and disturb him. Occasionally, some of the children crept past Eldra's sharp watch, climbed the path, and peered with wonder at the god as he sat motionless in a cloud of whirling light-specks. They came back and told their elders of the swarm of bright "bugs" that hovered around the god, and hearing them, Eldra boxed their ears and said, "He communes with the gods who dwell in the stars! Let him not find you up there!"

It was two months before Eldra's time. In spite of her bulk, she remained furiously active while Kor retired to his glade to create. With greater practice, a facility came into his handling of the creative matrix. He sat in a mist of electrons, moulding, shaping, trying desperately to capture the elusive pattern that would bring his creation to life. A buzzing voice cut across his mental horizon.

"What are you doing creature?"

"Go away," said Kor.

"What are you, creature?"

"I am God," replied Kor. "Can you not see I am creating?"

He looked up. The glade was empty except for himself. His glance came back to a wavering patch between two trees

. . . a shimmering spindle of disturbed air that gave him a qualm. Almost, he was afraid.

"I do not read your voice, creature," returned the buzzing thought-note.

The buzz was in Kor's mind rather than his ears. It was ready, high-pitched, and brought with it a nervous pseudo-memory that made him tremble. The cloud of sparkling electrons hovering around him winked out. Automatically, without conscious thought, Kor touched his knee, his chin. His fingers made signs.

"You speak the sign language of the Trisz," said the voice. "What are you doing here?"

Kor signed a reply, his hands responding to the subconscious pattern of his thought.

"I am God. I create. Go away."

Kor's mind, expanded during his creation occupation, had touched the creature at the edge of the glade. That was why the Trisz had stopped there instead of approaching closer. It had felt the influence of his mind. It was puzzled. Perhaps it was afraid.

The Trisz said, "How comes one so far from the living

worlds to know the sign language of the Trisz?"

"I am God," Kor replied. "I know everything."

"I have heard of God, who is worshipped in many forms throughout the Universe," said the Trisz. "Are you the same?"

"I am God," Kor repeated. "I am the Universe."

"Can this be true?" marveled the Trisz. "There seems little difference between you and the aborigines of this world. Where do you come from?"

"Who needs to come from a place, who is all places at once?"

"You say you create, then. What?"

Kor answered with cunning. "I am creating the Universe."

"Not this Universe, for it stands created. Do you create another?"

"Why not? May I not create as many as I please?"

"Did you create the other universes? The Universe of the Trisz?"

"By what right do you question me who am God? Begone, lest I destroy you!"

The Trisz swayed nervously at the edge of the glade. Even after millennia of occupation, it found this baffling Universe in many respects an enigma.

Could this alien thing actually be God? The Trisz doubted it.

Kor felt a sense of alarm. An unknown emotion stirred in him. It was hate, but he did not know it.

"Who are you that come here to disturb me?" he asked the wavering patch between the trees.

"If you are God, you must know who I am," retorted the Trisz.

"God will not be tempted to prove himself. I say I am God. If you do not believe, so much the worse for you."

The presence of the Trisz chilled Kor. He had no desire to argue with it. Its probing questions upset his balance, made him fretful and uneasy. He drew his mind back into the confines of his skull, sat stolidly silent.

He did not hear the child break from the underbrush at the lip of the precipice and run toward him across the glade. The Trisz darted instantaneously. It was a flashing blur that whipped across the grassy space, enveloped the child.

"If you are God," it mocked, "save this child!"

The thurb child stiffened in the vibratory grip of the Trisz, on its face an expression of frozen horror.

A glare of light burst in

Kor's mind. He reacted automatically, with powers he did not know he possessed. He whipped the glade into time-stasis. The lashing field enveloped the Trisz. For an instant Kor's mind was dazzled with a flood of perception from the Trisz. His mind went *through* space, penetrated time. The Trisz shrilled its mental agony and ceased to exist. The flow of thought ceased abruptly, sank beneath the fogs that clouded Kor's mind. The thurb child ran screaming back the way it had come.

Kor sat and pondered what had happened. He was deeply shaken, but he did not know why. He did not know what he had done to the alien thing. He only knew that he had felt the urge to destroy, and this something that was on his mind, on the other side of the veil, had burst forth and retreated . . . and the Trisz was destroyed.

He listened. Shrill cries drifted faintly upward from the caves below. They bore a sound of alarm, fear and anger. Kor stood up as Eldra burst heavily from the head of the path and stumbled toward him.

"Lord, lord, save us! The gods from the sky are come!"

Kor seized her, shook her. Her head was loose on her neck. She was hysterical with fright. A score of tribespeople burst shouting from the head of the path. They threw themselves in a grovelling heap around Kor.

He said, "What happens?"

A brawny hunter lifted himself on his hands.

"Gods from the sky steal the people of Go!"

Kor turned impatiently toward the path, but it erupted a hurrying horde of cave men.

He said, "Tell me about it—quickly!"

"They are like yourself, lord, and like the thurb as well. They walk in gleaming garments and a strange light accompanies them in the air as they go. They have torn caves out of the sky and brought them into the valley. They are putting the people of Go into their caves!"

Kor swung away, across the glade and into the wood. From the hogback, he would be able to see into the valley, where the canyon came out upon the broader, low-lying stretch among the foothills. He went swiftly, tearing through the underbrush. Like a pack of baying hounds, the thurb streamed after him, calling upon him for succor.

Kor stood on the lip of the

precipice that overlooked the valley. The cliff towered above it a thousand feet or more. Three silvery, oval shapes hugged the green carpet of the valley floor. The ships of the Trisz shone in the sun, awakening feeble memories in Kor's darkened mind. He willed, and his super-senses lashed out in a widening circle, sensed the surroundings. A struggle took place in the caves. The cave people were fighting for their lives, but the invaders paralyzed them where they stood, carried them out through the gaping cave mouths.

Kor touched their minds. Creatures of the Trisz, these, taking the people of Go for food for the Trisz. Kor sensed the shrill whine of the aliens. He felt dull, glowing anger.

The people of Go swarmed on the brink around him, burrowed in the brush, peered at the unknown wonder of the Trisz space vessels. Behind them rose the forested slope of the mountains, to the dazzling line of eternal snow, and the hovering cloud that gleamed dull red in the glow of subterranean fires.

Kor said to Eldra, "Kor's enemies, Eldra's enemies. Kor is angry with them for coming here."

Eldra wailed, cried out her lord's saying to the people.

"Slay the enemy, lord!" cried the people of Go. "Protect us!"

Kor said, "Kor is God. He protects his people."

He brooded solemnly over the scene below. Hatred screamed inside of him. The blue sky pressed close. The sun was a blazing shield in the sky. Kor flung aside his deer-skin robe, stood naked and tall in the glare of the sun. He poised his body as if to leap into the abyss—and abruptly vanished from the sight of the cave people. A moan of terror went up from the thurb.

On the surface of the distant sun, a mighty storm swirled. A suction of energy funneled into the passage hewed through subspace by Kor's mind. Where he had stood, blazing luminescence shot tongues of fire. And suddenly, a stream lashed out. Scintillant flame poured roaring into the valley, and Kor stood again, rigid upon the lip of the precipice.

Already the thurb had begun to run in crazed fear. As the frightful surge of pure energy blasted into the valley, the ground shook under their feet. Thunder rolled deafeningly from mountain to moun-

tain, set up crescendoing vibrations that made the pines whip, set the boulders to grinding under foot. The land heaved and buckled.

A mist sprang up from the valley, a mist of deadly, radiating particles that hung in an opalescent pall over the crimson glow of destruction. The mountain heaved and shook again. The valley boiled with flame. A titanic roar as of all the thunderclaps that ever were slammed down from above. The day flared with a frightful heat. The mountain groaned and shook to its core.

A voice screamed, raw-edged with frenzy.

"The mountain! The god of the mountain throws fire!"

The volcano trembled, lurched. Flames shot from its simmering peak, coiled lashing into the stratosphere. Dark, formless objects shot upward with a thunderous sound. Black, greasy smoke boiled from the shuddering cone, rolled down the snow-covered flank in which long, black gashes had begun to show. Lightning flashed and quivered in a sky abruptly gone dark.

"Lord, Lord!" whimpered Eldra.

Kor seized her arm, hurried her ahead of him. His deer-skin cloak lay forgotten where

he had thrown it. His mind was in turmoil. He did not know what had happened. He had hated—then this. The world had dissolved around them. The air was thick with smoke and hot, falling ash as they lurched down the path. Sometimes the ground shook so that it seemed they must be hurled into space and annihilated on the rocks far below. Screams pierced the dark. Eldra clung to Kor, sobbing.

"The god of the mountain is angry with us!" she cried. "He punishes his people for worshipping Kor!"

"Shut up!" said Kor.

He spoke too late. Already he heard other voices taking up the cry voiced by Eldra.

Kor fought his way grimly downward, booting the struggling tribes-people ahead of him. At the bottom, they would have run for the caves, but the cliff-face was slowly disintegrating and falling in chunks. Cave men were running in all directions, among them figures dressed in the silvery space uniform of the Trisz. All were one in this inferno. The boiling smog of the volcano poured into the canyon, obliterating sight.

Kor began to shout at those who ran past. His mind reached out, sensed them, and he cried out to them to run up

the canyon. Licking flames crept in from the valley, a blistering hell-spot whose fires would rage unchecked for a millenium. Soon the magma from the erupting peak would be pouring into the canyon.

The cave men stormed up the canyon, over the hogback and into the ravine beyond. When it grew impossible to see more than a foot or two in any direction, Kor left off shouting. He could sense a few tribesmen still wandering dazed in the midnight of the canyon, but his voice could no longer be heard above the crash and roar of the bursting volcano. The ground shook and swayed, throwing Eldra flat with every other step. She was screaming now.

"My baby . . . my baby . . ."

Kor gathered her in his arms and set off swiftly up the canyon. He could move faster than the cave men. He did not need eyes to see where he was going. As he passed stumbling stragglers, he roared to them to make haste. The universe spun around him. He sensed a tremendous crack that suddenly opened in the solid ground ahead. Screams cut through the rancid smoke as a few cave men blundered over the edge and plunged into the abyss.

Kor ran around the end of the crack, where the solid rock was split almost to the wall of the canyon. He ran as a deer-creature runs, balancing himself precisely in spite of the darkness that blinded his sight. He carried his burden gently, easing the jar of his running with the spring-like muscles of his arms. Eldra moaned softly in his grasp.

The larger part of the tribesmen were already pouring over the hogback. As Kor topped the rise, he found the air thinning slightly into a grayish, opaque mistiness. He followed the cave men over, under the swaying conifers, shouting as he went, urging them to scale the next ridge and the one beyond that, and to keep on going until the menace of the erupting volcano was left far behind.

All afternoon and all night long, the fleeing cave men blundered through the brush, scrambled down steep slopes, laboriously climbed the following ridges. Sobbing, panting, stumbling over stones, sliding on the slippery surface of last year's fallen needles, numb with the rigor of terror, they fought through the smoke and rain of ash. When the ash no longer rained, when the fire bombs ceased to thud among them, they had reached the

edge of the foothills and it was dawn. The sun rose on a weary, spent group that flung itself on the bank of a creek and drank greedily.

Far behind, Kor struggled over a ridge with his burden. Eldra's arms were tight around his neck, and she screamed with every step he took. Her face was dewed with the cold sweat of agony. Kor knew what it meant. He laid Eldra on the ground, where she rolled and cried out with the pain of childbirth.

Kor knelt beside her, tried to collect his confused sensibilities. He had healed the sick in the caves, he had banished the pain of the wounded. How had he done it? His eyes started from his head. His body ran with the sweat of his exertions. His flesh was exhausted, his brain was tired beyond endurance. He laid his hands on the tossing woman, and she screamed at the contact.

Kor tried to collect his thoughts, to order them. He sought frantically for the sparkling, darting electrons but none came. His power was gone. He was no longer a god. Shocked horror held him rigid, stricken with grief. Eldra screamed and screamed . . . and the baby was born

dead. Kor looked at it and shuddered, turned his glance aside. No such monster could have lived. It was hideous . . . a freak . . . an abortive cross between differing species of the human family. And with the going out of her monstrous child, the life went out of Eldra, too, and Kor dropped his head in his hands and wept.

It was hours later that he picked his way through the forest. A cairn of broken lava covered the tragedy he left behind. Kor was aware of pain and weakness. And he was aware of another sensation—one he could not remember having felt before—hunger. His mouth was dry with thirst as he stumbled along. His mind was a prisoner in his skull. He had only his eyes to see with, his ears for hearing, his sense of touch.

His hunger mounted and thirst became an agony of torment. Weariness dragged at his limbs, but he plunged on after the cave men who had gone before. The sky was overcast, threatening. Far behind, the atmosphere rumbled with distant explosions. An icy wind soughed through the bending conifers.

Kor came at last upon the plain. A thin line of trees

marked the course of a stream. He plunged his naked body into a pool, drank thirstily, bathed the blood, dirt and sweat from his skin. His belly gripped with hunger.

The sky was lurid over the mountains. The volcano exploded with a muffled, drum-like beat. Kor followed the course of the creek, and soon came upon the huddled tribesmen, too spent to travel further. He seated himself on a rock and gazed somberly at them. Others were still arriving, coming down from the wooded flanks of the foothills.

A cave man looked up, saw Kor sitting there.

"Kor!" he cried out.

Others of the cave people looked up. Some that had seemed to sleep in their wretched misery rolled over and looked at him. Their looks were looks of hate. Kor sunk in his sorrow; he did not hear the jabber that went up from the people of Go.

"This is Kor, who has destroyed us!"

"He aroused the anger of the mountain god!"

"He has destroyed our caves!"

"He has killed our people!"

"He is a false god whose worship leads to ruin!"

It was only when the crumbling uproar became vocif-

erous shouting that Kor looked up. Every thurb regarded him with malignant anger. Many hunters lay dead in the ruins of the canyon. Many women and children had fallen to the flames and the thundering gouts of lava that had jetted from the sky. The mob of cave men closed in on Kor, led by a mightily thewed giant of a thurb. He was Tharg.

Kor waited for Tharg to speak.

Tharg said, "You are the cause of all this, false god!"

"I tried to save you," Kor replied dully. "Did I not destroy the caves from the sky and the gods who brought them hither?"

"You destroyed the caves of Go and the people who dwelt in them! You have killed our brothers, our sons, our fathers, and our women!"

Kor let his head hang heavily. He said, "Where is my friend An-Ga?"

"An-Ga is dead. The mountain ate him."

One more grief piled onto many.

Kor groaned. "The Trisz would have eaten you all. I could not help what happened."

Tharg lifted his head and bellowed in triumph.

"He admits he is not a god!

He has posed falsely among us!"

"Did I not heal your sick, banish your pains, and mend your broken bones?"

Tharg darted back into the crowd, returned thrusting one ahead of him whose arm hung limp and bloody.

"Here is a broken arm. Heal it, god!"

The well of bitterness within Kor overflowed. He knew he could not heal the arm. He looked away. The cave man retreated into the group, nursing his broken arm. A look of what had been hope was now turned to hatred and despair.

"Stone him! Stone him!" screamed the mob.

"Why do you blame me . . . ?" Kor asked gently, but further words were dashed brutally from his mouth by Tharg's heavy hand. A dozen leaped on Kor at once, held him spread-eagled on the ground. Others rushed and milled, shouting insanely. Kor heard the chopping of a stone axe. The sound of chopping endured while those who held him twisted his limbs, tormented his flesh. Sweat stood out on him, but he bit his lip against an outcry.

Shortly a group returned from the wood, bearing a pole, the trunk of a young conifer.

It was about twenty feet long, rough-barked, as thick through as a big man's thigh. It smelled of pitch and fresh, flowing sap.

Rough hands whirled Kor over, lashed his wrists over his head to the pole, secured his ankles. Others had busied themselves digging a pit in the ground. The end of the pole was slid into it. It was hoisted erect and wedged into place with stones. Kor hung from his lashed wrists, agony tearing at his arms and shoulders.

He hung far off the ground, over the heads of the cave men. His pain was excruciating. He heard the taunts of those below.

"You are a god? Save yourself!"

A great rock whizzed through the air, struck the pole below Kor's feet, jarred him with painful vibration.

Kor groaned and cried out.

"Am I a thurb that you stone me so? What crime have I done you?"

For answer, they jeered and mocked him. Stones whistled dangerously close. A fist-sized rock smashed against his thigh.

"Save yourself!" screamed the Go.

Kor knew that he could not. The pain that wracked him

sent waves of blackness over his mind. A stone thudded against his ribs; another smashed upon his rigid arms and he heard the bones crack.

The world was a screaming, yelling cacophony of horror. A vision of Soma hovered in Kor's dimming mind—of Eldra torn with agony—of a monstrous infant—

Darkness swooped upon the plain. The angry yells of the Go changed to shrill cries of wonder, screams of fear. Gentle hands reached out of the air, touched Kor's body. His bonds fell away. He floated free, without weight. . . .

CHAPTER XIX

"WE GOT the whole story, of course," said Devon, Technical Director of the Psycho-Neural Institute on the planet Gramm.

He sat behind an enormous desk—a desk sized to its master, for Devon was an enormous man himself. He sat loosely, sprawled back in his chair, chewing the stub of a cigar. He took the stub out of his mouth, and waved it over the array of charts, graphs, and typewritten commentaries that littered his desk.

"You have taken a great load off my mind, Doctor," Tor Shan said, relieved. "I suppose

I do not need to tell you that you have in your care the most important mind in the Universe?"

Devon shook his cigar at a distant ash-try. Ashes showered the litter on his desk.

"You need have no worry, Sir. Kor is doing unusually well, considering the severity of his condition. We understand it better now, of course, than we did two months ago when you first brought him in—the fundamental aspect of his case, that is. We've not only been able to get the whole story of what happened from him, but we've saved his memory of it as well . . . *that* was touch and go for a while. But Doctor Naz tried some new techniques we've been developing here at the Institute. The results, I might say, have quite exceeded our expectations. His mind is quite normal now. Here—take a look at this material."

Devon handed over a sheaf of papers. Tor Shan read rapidly through. Finally he lifted his eyes, stared through the open window at the greenish tinged sky of Gramm, among the Far Stars, an isolated planet where the Men had established an ecological experiment station.

Principally, the work at the Institute was concerned with

problems of climate of mind incident to the settling of new worlds. Colonizing among the stars was certain to present psychological problems, and these the Men endeavored to anticipate and forestall in the galactic experiment stations. The problems were routine only in the sense that they were expected and that they would finally yield to persistent study. When colonization began in earnest, the Men would be ready with proper techniques and indoctrinations to settle the People easily into their new environments.

Tor Shan brought his glance back to Devon.

"I feel it will be difficult for me to face the boy," he said slowly. "I am responsible for his condition—for the loss of his wife. A great shock to him."

"He is completely recovered from that shock," Devon returned easily. "Actually, Kor suffered two distinct shocks simultaneously: the loss of his wife and his conflict with his Oath as a Man. His normal desire was to attack the Trisz with whatever power he could command and so attempt to save the woman's life. Had he done this, he might have saved his mind. As it was, he found himself on the horns of a

dilemma. The conflict between his duty to his wife and his duty to his Manhood was too much for him to bear. Remember, the decision he had to make was a split-second one. His sanity shattered under the strain."

Tor Shan weighed the papers in his hand.

"He seemed to possess for a while an unconscious use of certain of his mental powers. Then he lost this use. How do you account for that?"

Devon shrugged.

"Who knows what he was thinking when he came out on the bank of the creek and saw the Trisz devouring his wife?" Devon permitted a shudder to ripple through his bulk. "You have said that his greatest drawback was personal pride; you tried to help him free himself of it. Perhaps his thoughts were concerned with his pride in being a Man. Very well. Some of that would stick with him, below the conscious level. He went 'on automatic', as we say. His powers burst forth automatically in response to some unusual call of his will. For the better part of a year, he went without food or water. The practice is not recommended for such long periods of time, and in his case, the result was not en-

tirely beneficial to his tissues. The digestive and eliminative organs suffered especially—became atrophied. As far as his mind goes, Kor could be discharged today, but he needs a further period of physical acclimatization to return to the normal level.

"It is easy enough to speculate on why his powers deserted him entirely at the end. It probably was his subconscious realization that he had violated his Oath of Manhood in using his powers against the Trisz. He could not consciously reason this, of course. That's why the shut-off was so drastically final. Below the conscious level, he felt that he had degraded himself from the stature of a Man by violating his Oath. He was no longer worthy to be a Man."

"How long will you need to keep him here?"

"Six weeks, at least."

Tor Shan nodded thoughtfully.

"The Trisz, of course, are alerted in the vicinity of the Karelian system. Our spies have transmitted to us an account of the meeting between Kor and the Trisz—from the Trisz point of view. His actions upset them considerably. They have not yet connected him with the Men, but his use of the sign language has con-

vinced them that he was foreign to Karel IV. They are working their Extrapolators overtime in all parts of the Universe." He tapped the papers in his hand. "However, we are fortunate that the Trizz have not connected Kor with the destruction of their exploring vessels. They consider that the work of the erupting volcano."

"Have they taken any retaliatory steps?"

"Against Karel IV? None, except to mark the planet out of bounds and to set a patrol around the system to observe it. Too—" he chuckled—"they have been badgering the Blue Brotherhood for further enlightenment on the nature of God and the casuistic principles of religion. We have reports that other religious bodies on numerous planets are being queried in the same manner."

Devon laughed. "I daresay what they find out won't help them. Would you like to see Kor now, Sir?"

Tor Shan stood up.

"Immediately, Doctor. I shall have to leave soon."

Kor was relaxed in a deep leather chair. His hands were brown and emaciated. They rested moveless on the broad arms of his chair. He was

dressed in regulation hospital garments, a throw-over robe, and a pair of slippers. Hospital barbers had sheared his hair and shaved his beard. His cheeks and neck showed a startling pallor; where his face had been exposed, the skin was as brown as his hands.

Kor smiled, got up quickly as Devon entered with Tor Shan.

"Sit down, sit down, boy!" Tor Shan gestured violently and took Kor's hand as the latter sank back into his chair.

"I'll leave you, Sir. Lecture coming up," Devon said. "There are no restrictions on talking to the patient. When you are ready to leave, I'd like to see you again. Ask one of the nurses."

He smiled a friendly goodbye and left the two alone.

"I hope you like it here," Tor Shan began awkwardly.

Kor nodded quickly. "They've been wonderful to me, Sir." His voice was swift, eager. He seemed buoyant with returned vigor.

"I am glad, Kor. I would like to say how sorry I am, but it seems rather useless. . . ."

Kor offered the ghost of a smile.

"It really doesn't matter, Sir—too much. I brought it all on myself, of course. I—I'll

tell you about that later. Just now, I'd like to say that I've made that—that recovery you told me I needed."

Tor Shan nodded solemnly.

"I told you that you would not need to mention it. I see that you have."

"If you don't mind, Sir, I want to talk about it. I—I thought there was something of professorial authoritarianism about you when you brought the subject up. I've learned you were right. You were referring to my pride, of course. Pride just does not go with being a Man. It's funny how proud you can be, and at the same time think you are the most humble creature in the galaxy! I'm grateful to Doctor Naz for saving my memory of the Karelian episode. Without it, I should probably be pretty much the same old Kor. As it is, I can remember the height of my pride . . . when I thought I was God . . ." His lips twisted in a wry smile. "Better still, I remember the depths of my degradation when the Go denounced me and would have put me to death if the Saints you sent to look for me had not intervened at just the right time."

"You do not consider the cave men responsible for their actions?"

"Certainly not. As I said before, I was responsible. We will go into that later. I want to talk this out. The things that happened to me on Karel IV seem like a dream now—bizarre and preposterous. Yet I know it was real. I really lived with the people of Go, and did the things I did. They kept telling me I was a god, you see—all but Tharg, that is. Poor devil of a villain! I hope he has not taken it to heart that he has 'slain a god'!"

Tor Shan smiled. "I thought you might like to know that we've kept an eye on the thurb. After your—immolation, they migrated across the plain. They found the analyzing laboratory you landed there. Are you interested in hearing about it?"

Kor leaned forward. "Very much, Sir!"

"We had intended removing the laboratory, of course. We were searching for it and that is how we happened to chance upon the thurb. We made a mental survey of the situation and learned they had connected the bubble with you. They were happily settled around it—they called it the 'Sky Cave of the God Kor'. I am afraid you are still a god to the thurb, Kor, along with the deified Eldra. There is a healthy

religion going strong among the thurb, one that could easily lead to the path of Manhood, if they don't get lost in the by-paths of dogma, creed, and ritual."

Kor shook his head wonderingly.

"With the death of An-Ga, Tharg assumed a natural leadership. An-Ga would never have permitted it. The Go must have killed him."

Tor Shan smiled slightly. "On the contrary. Tharg is very much alive. It seems that your chieftain's brother came out of the holocaust alive and assumed his brother's chieftainship. Tharg has a title under the new order. He is called High Priest of Kor!"

Kor mused on the strange turn-about of affairs among the thurb.

"That will all be changed, of course," he smiled, "when colonists are transported to the Karelian System."

"There will be no colonists on Karel IV. We have reserved it on our list as a very special kind of experiment."

Kor nodded. "You would arrange it that way. You took the bubble away, though, of course."

"Yes. We left them only their memories . . . to help them develop their minds...."

Kor sighed.

"Another thing I wanted to mention, Sir," he put in abruptly, "is that I had personal contact with the Trisz on Karel IV."

"I read that in Devon's report."

"Devon's report—oh! That doesn't begin to state the situation, Sir. I found out everything there is to know about the Trisz!"

Tor Shan leaned eagerly forward.

"What did you discover? Quickly, boy!"

Kor smiled, relaxed in his chair and closed his eyes.

"I—I'm growing very tired, Sir."

Tor Shan stood nervously erect. An agitated expression crossed his face.

"I shouldn't have tired you! I will go."

"It would be best, Sir."

Kor smiled contentedly, drew a folded paper from his pocket and tendered it to the older man.

"I understand I may not leave the hospital for a few weeks yet. I don't want to waste any time. I have made a list of a few things I should like to have brought to me here."

Tor Shan scanned the list. His brows went up.

"Electronic cybernograph—

thousand kilo-volt energy pile, portable—silver wire—resistors—condensor-collectors...." Tor Shan's glance continued to the bottom of the impressive list. He snapped the paper crisply in his palm.

"Is this important, Kor?"

"Extremely, Sir. Just a beginning, of course, to help me work out a few fundamentals. Later, I'll need a fully equipped psycho-physical laboratory and the mental resources of the entire Brotherhood of Men. But that stuff will do for the present."

Tor Shan opened his mouth to speak, thought better of it, and left at once. An obliging nurse directed him to the classroom where Technical Director Devon was holding forth before a small class of off-duty attendants, doctors, and nurses.

Devon dismissed the gathering, turned his attention to Tor Shan.

"You are returning to Rth at once, Sir?"

"Yes," Tor Shan replied. "Here." He handed over Kor's list. "Can any of this material be supplied here?"

Devon scanned the list expertly.

"About all of it, Sir, except the cybernograph. We haven't any third-order integrating equipment at all. We haven't

any need for it. A portable model would almost fill a room the size of this one!"

"Very well," Tor Shan spoke crisply. "Get the rest of this stuff together, then. I will transmit the cybernograph from Sub-den." He turned abruptly to leave.

"After I get it together," Devon inquired, "what shall I do with it?"

"Give it to Kor," Tor Shan tossed over his shoulder. "He will know what to do with it!"

CHAPTER XX

KOR faced his distinguished listeners in one of the large suite of rooms that had been turned over to his activities. Devon and Tor Shan were there, and a company of about twenty of the keenest scientific minds in the Brotherhood of Men.

The curious machine at Kor's back half-filled the room. Looking at it, one had the impression that he saw only part of it—that the machine went on and on, into other spaces and other times. Here was a machine beyond all machines, as the Men were beyond all men, and Kor was beyond the Men. It was an ultimate machine, partaking of unguessable principles, functioning in illimitable ways.

"I want to begin my discussion," Kor told them, "with a brief survey of the concepts underlying the work I have just accomplished here."

Devon drew a cigar from his pocket, focussed his attention on the tip of it until the tobacco flamed, then settled back in his chair with a look of interest, blue coils of smoke wreathing his head. Tor Shan and the others leaned forward.

Kor began.

"First, a brief recapitulation of the orders of reasoning. Deductive reasoning is our first order of rationalization. It is most highly exemplified in the field of mathematics. Mathematics, however, is less an exact science than a science of exactitudes. Mathematics deals entirely with exact premises, and exactness exists nowhere in our Universe. Mathematics, as a means of reasoning, therefore, can express only ideal conclusions. It is the language of the Universe around us.

"Inductive reasoning is the second order of rationalization. Isolated facts are brought together, and from their behavior, a general law is induced to explain them. Inductive reasoning opened the portals of science to man's

groping mind, for by its means the natural laws of the Universe were worked out in earliest times.

"Strangely enough, men thought for thousands of years that these two were the only possible methods of reasoning. They thought this because these are methods of conscious rationalization.

"In the early periods of our race, any mental or so-called psychic phenomenon not well understood was relegated to the supernatural category and ignored. What used to be called telepathy, teleportation, prevision, and so on, were considered by some to be supernatural manifestations. Others, in a desperate gesture toward scientific rationalization, called them 'parapsychological phenomena'. Neither term is capable of semantic abstraction. Most scientists shrugged such phenomena off as mere superstitions of the masses.

"Another inhibiting factor of the early discovery of third order rationalization was the common misunderstanding held toward what then were variously labeled instinct, intuition, and the subconscious mind. Any mental phenomenon not yielding to empiric methods of investigation was either cast into one

of the first two categories, or hastily dumped in the province of the third—and no attempt was made to define any of them.

"It was from these little known and largely discredited functions of the human mind that the first Men received what they thought to be hints of the existence of a third order of logic—that method of rationalization which transcends both deduction and induction and is the survival factor which works toward the preservation of the individual when all other methods of conscious reasoning fail. The form of third-order rationalization is not readily apparent to conscious investigation . . . it cannot be consciously detected as a function. The function is inferred by analyzing its results. Without the mental training to which the Men are subjected from early childhood, evidence of its existence is flighty and inconclusive—what used to be interpreted as instinct or intuition.

"On the other hand, the higher orders of third-order logic have never been explored, even by the Men. Our attempt at extrapolation, for instance, is weak, hazy, and fraught with errors."

Kor laughed suddenly, explosively.

"As a matter of fact, I myself committed the most colossal of blunders in trying to extrapolate—a blunder so important that it has rid our Universe of the Trisz, will completely change the future of the Men, and through them, of the People!"

Devon chewed heavily on his cold cigar and frowned with concentration. Tor Shan appeared eagerly interested.

"You said it *has* rid the Universe of the Trisz?"

Kor nodded.

"Quite so. The Universe *has* been rid of the Trisz!"

Tor Shan looked at Devon.
"Doctor, are you sure—?"

Devon as in the act of concentrating the dead hulk of his cigar into combustion. He drew heavily and expelled a cloud of smoke. He wagged his head.

"He's sane, Sir. In fact, more than sane, if our graphs have any meaning. I think we are now getting at something that has had me puzzled ever since we made our first electropsychographic readings of his mind. I want to know why extrapolation of his graph shows no descending variations of the third-order function. Can you explain that, Kor?"

"Because," Kor replied emphatically, "there is no reason to stop at third-order logic, as there was not to stop with deduction and induction as methods of reasoning. The orders of logic are infinite in number—and my mind has developed to the point of encompassing them all!"

Tor Shan and Devon both began to expostulate at once. The room was an uproar of rumbling objections. Kor smiled and waved his hand for silence.

"Gentlemen . . . please! What I have said is not so astounding as it appears. I have made a statement of fact, but I cannot enlarge upon it now. There will be time ahead for making it clear to you. I want to describe the blunder I mentioned.

"Let us return to the planet Karel IV. Every act I performed there was plotted in advance. When I thought I was activating the third-order function to extrapolate future events, I actually side-stepped that function and made use of a *new* order of beyond-logic. Actually, what I did determined, rather than foretold, the future!"

Again, the assembly uttered excited comments. Kor held up his hand.

"I should be ashamed to say

it," he grinned wryly, "but from the moment I left the Institute, instead of extrapolating the future, as I thought, I was determining the events of my own future through a system of determinant logic transcending the recognized third-order function. That is why my attempts at extrapolation failed—why yours failed also." He nodded at Tor Shan. "You could not foretell my future actions, because they stemmed from a new Cause originating in my own mind, and had no relationship to past events. My every act was destined to bring me in the shortest possible time into intimate contact with the Trisz, so that I could learn the things which I have learned."

Devon stabbed with the odorous butt of his cigar.

"A blunder, as you put it, is easy to make in extrapolation. The perceived result may be only a figment of the imagination instead of a viridical picture of the future event. What gives you the impression that you were actually making the future?"

Kor waved a sheaf of papers aloft.

"I have been working day and night with the cybernograph, integrating the factors.

The cybernograph proves the assumption I made from observation—here is the math as well as the mechanics of the situation."

Tor Shan and Devon both grabbed for the papers at once. Kor jerked them back.

"This material will keep a while longer. The future has already been determined. The Trisz are already destroyed. Only I can change that chain of events, and I am not about to try!"

He frowned thoughtfully at his audience.

"Back on Karel IV, there was an instant in which the Trisz mind was wide open to mine. I do not mean the mind of what you probably think of as that individual Trisz, but of *the* Trisz—the parent body, which does not exist in this space and time at all!"

Cries of astonishment went up from the assembly.

"The concept of contiguous universes, of probability universes, of interlocking universes, and so on, is not a new one," Kor continued. He gestured toward the machine at his back. "This device proves the fact: there are universes infinite in number, each separated from the other by the thinnest of imaginable partitions. Let me show you."

He adjusted several dials

and depressed a stud. Parts of the machine lighted up as vacuum tubes warmed rapidly. A soft humming came from it.

"This," Kor went on, "is a tiny model of the machine that will destroy the Trisz—I should say, that has destroyed the Trisz, since that future is already determined. I built it to ascertain experimentally the factors I have been telling you about. You will notice this . . ." He pointed toward the heart of the machine, where a tiny violet flame arced continuously between two electrodes.

"That arc is a point of contact between our space-time and another, somewhere among the infinite number of universes that do exist. Semantics breaks down—words become meaningless when we try to describe the existence of these universes. Shall we say that they are on different planes, have varying periods of vibration? Much study will be required to devise an adequate language to express the physical situation.

"However, if I thrust the end of a stylus into the arc—like this . . ." He thrust the instrument into the flame until half its length was swallowed." . . . "it passes through the hole I have created in

space-time and emerges in another universe."

The forefront of his audience crowded close. The stylus seemed to end abruptly at the point where it touched the outer influence of the tiny arc. Kor withdrew the stylus, held it up, then inserted it again as before.

"Now," he said, "if I change the adjustment of the machine to switch over to still another of the infinite number of existing universes . . ." He turned a dial slowly. The machine howled, and Kor held up the stylus, neatly sliced off at the middle. "The other end of this stylus," he grinned, "was left in the first universe as the influence of the machine was moved to the second."

He called or order at this point, and the Men reluctantly returned to their seats.

"What is the Trisz?" Kor went on. "It is a single, universal being existing in another universe adjacent to our own—and it completely fills that universe! It consists of what we would consider pure energy. In our Universe, the Trisz would be a solid body—matter, not energy. The Trisz, in its own universe, is infinite in size; it is intelligent, but not infinite in intelligence.

"The Trisz universe is time-

less. Only its excursion into this Universe has made the Trisz aware of time, which it sees as an obstacle to continuity. Time, in its function as the catalyst of awareness, is the one factor which permits us to exist here as we do—and prevents the Trisz from entering our universe completely. The vibratory influence of time, acting like the shutter of a motion picture projector, allows the Trisz to project itself into this universe only in infinitesimal spurts instead of all at once and everywhere simultaneously. Imagine the Trisz as like the head of a chicken pecking corn, moving rapidly back and forth. It can penetrate into our Universe only during the positive swing of the time-cycle, and must withdraw on the negative. Because of its high cyclic rate of vibration, keyed to our time rate, the Trisz appears to us as a closed energy form.

"We never dared expose our powers in the neighborhood of the Trisz. But only by doing so could the nature of the Trisz be discovered. When I trapped the Trisz in the field of the time-stasis, its true nature became apparent to me. My mind drained the Trisz mind of its entire store of knowledge." Kor tapped

his forehead significantly. "Everything the Trisz knows, I know too—and a few things besides!"

His listeners sat now with bated breath.

"How many parts of the Trisz are in view at one time? Only one . . . the same Trisz is everywhere observable simultaneously. The Trisz is a whole—not a multiplicity of individuals. It simply manifests itself as it wills—subject to the limitations set upon it by the time-element of our universe.

"The Trisz had a beginning countless billions of years ago, as we would reckon it. It was the only life-form in its universe. It began as a freak wisp of energy that fed and grew. It was born in the airless reaches of interstellar space, and it fed on the radiation of distant suns. As the Trisz grew, it reached out for the stars, swallowed them and drained them of their energy to feed its own swiftly growing bulk.

"The universe of the Trisz is now cold and dark. The energy of its last sun was long ago drunk by the Trisz. The Trisz became a field of static energy, with nowhere further to grow into. How long its intelligence lay in a quiescent state, we have no means of

knowing. Undoubtedly it still felt the desire to expand, to feed insatiably upon energy. Time could not exist for it, because it had destroyed time in its own universe when it destroyed the last particle of material awareness which that universe contained. It would do the same to this Universe, allowed sufficient time to continue growing and to develop refinements in its penetration technique. But the time of the Trisz has run out. The Trisz exists simultaneously not only in space but in time—so it knows its own future. It is aware of its own end, and what that end will be . . . but it cannot know when it will occur because it has no actual appreciation of time. I know what the Trisz' end is . . . and I know when it will occur. That is why I have said that the Trisz has already been destroyed, because its future is absolutely determined—as much as if it had already happened."

"Tell me," said Tor Shan. "If the Trisz expansion took place solely in search of energy, why does it bother with the inhabitants of our Universe? Why doesn't it draw energy directly from the stars?"

"The amount of energy re-

quired to open a hole in space," Kor returned, "is prodigious—almost infinite. The nature of the Trisz, as a diffuse body of energy existing in no-time, will not permit it to concentrate more than a small portion of its available energy upon creating an opening. And the opening is a very small one—one that could not exist in the frightful force fields of a star. Therefore, the Trisz can draw only enough energy to maintain its inter-spatial opening."

"From the water stolen from the various planets?" suggested Devon, focusing the stub of his cold cigar into incandescence and puffing furiously.

Kor tapped his thumbnail with the shorn end of the stylus.

"From that—and one other source. We have always considered the Trisz in the light of being a more or less human type of conqueror. On the contrary, the Trisz is alien to everything we know. But we can liken him to the stock farmer with his watchdogs and herds of cattle.

"Evidence of Trisz killing is not new. We did not know how the Trisz killed, but now we do. The Trisz draws life-energy from its victim and converts it to its own vital

kind of energy. The Trisz colonies scattered throughout space? They do not exist! Colonists are recruited to furnish the Trisz with a constant supply of needed life-energy—from the hapless volunteers! Our entire Universe is nothing but a vast stock farm for the Trisz!"

Tor Shan grimaced. Devon dropped his cigar butt and ground it under foot. He focussed on the tip of a fresh cigar and puffed furiously. The assembly of Men rumbled protest.

"Very well," growled Devon. "If the Trisz is bound to be destroyed, I suppose there is nothing further we need do except sit back and wait until the creature goes poof! and vanishes."

"You need not worry about what to do, Doctor," Kor told him seriously. "We shall all be carried along by events as they occur. Our work is cut out for us now, and we can't avoid it." He turned to Tor Shan. "Your first move is to call in every Man from the Search Battalions, issue instructions to—"

CHAPTER XXI

THE project Kor put into action was titanic. He called upon the entire man-

power and technological resources of the Scarlet Saints. In unprecedented fashion, Kor was named Commander-in-Chief of the Brotherhood of Men, in supreme control everywhere. His least word became a command that was carried out to the letter.

In the cavern cities of Rth and the other inhabited planets where the Men maintained operations, every mind and machine was turned to the immediate problem.

"Power!" Kor said. "Energy! That is what we are going to need!"

He let them know the gigantic aspect of his plan, what he desired to do and why. Kor stood before the tri-dimensional space viewer in Tor Shan's office in Sub-den. His audience consisted of Tor Shan and the highest ranking members of the Men, those who wore the green robes of supreme authority. These were Men whose minds were keenest and most productive of all in the Organization.

Kor adjusted the viewer to his satisfaction. It disclosed a blazing cluster of supernal suns, light years distant in space.

"Here is an open cluster of stars," Kor pointed out, "about a million parsecs beyond the extreme edge of our

galaxy. It contains about five thousand stars, all possessing the same proper motion. As you can see from the nebular remnants connecting the stars, this is a young system, in which no living thing has yet developed."

The cluster under discussion glowed with the loveliness of precious stones strewn on a field of black velvet. Filmy strands of nebulosity looped from sun to sun, stood in delicate whorls and silken strands, an oasis of glowing lambence in the arid sterility of space.

"We will harness the energy of these suns—all of them," Kor continued. "I have already explained to you the technique of hurling the Fire out of Heaven—the ancient term being more romantic than descriptive. A similar technique, mechanically applied, will combine the energy of the suns in this cluster, will give us the power we need to penetrate into the universe of the Trisz."

Even as Kor talked, the legions of Men labored at the task. Dark stars in the cluster . . . great masses of matter huger than planets, rivalling the stars in size, but cold, solidified, served as power bases for the titanic undertaking. From a hundred planets of the

galaxy, a stream of material was being transmitted instantaneously through sub-space to permanent locations on those utterly airless and lightless worlds. Fantastic towers, bolstered and braced against the prodigious force of gravitation they had to combat, climbed into blazing-starred skies, stood as skeletal silhouettes against the drooping folds of nebulosity that glowingly spanned the firmament.

No such task could have been performed in secret. The Scarlet Saints threw off their mask of secrecy. Their hidden cities everywhere erected titanic force fields for protection against attacks by the Trisz that might mature at any hour. On Rth, the Saints were recalled from the Chapels. The situation was explained to the Blue Brotherhood, and as many as possible were transported bodily to the subterranean cities of the Men. The transition was performed smoothly.

But as quickly as the Men acted, the Trisz awoke to the realization of danger. Flying squads moved in on the Chapels, and though the scarlet-clad Men escaped, many of the Blue Brotherhood were taken by the avenging Thugs or dispatched on the spot by

one of the multifarious Trisz-manifestations.

Tor Shan told Kor about the fate of Blue Brother Set. The portly priest with saintly smile had not been one of those to escape the thrust of the Trisz.

On a thousand worlds, within the galaxy, closest to the field of the Men's operation, a Trisz combat fleet was shaping. The terrific disturbance set up by the activities of the Men in the sub-ether gave the Trisz direction. Nothing the Men did could be secret now; and the myriad Triszmen throughout the Universe labored to build a fleet that would destroy the installations the Men were building in the open cluster.

A patrol of Men numbering thousands covered the vast reach of extra-galactic space in and around the star cluster. Their minds were interlocked, spread in a vast screen encompassing trillions of cubic miles of space, to prevent the materialization of the Trisz interspatial penetration within the cluster.

But no such defense could avail against the mental power of the Trisz wielded over its slaves. They labored till they dropped, forging new weapons to arm the fleet that must de-

stroy this threat against Trisz domination of the Universe.

Kor worked feverishly on a giant world a hundred times the diameter of Rth. The great mass of its bulk set up strains in space itself, caused a thousand delays, presented a ceaseless stream of special problems, in readying the equipment. And just before the power-network was finished, the Trisz struck.

Important as Kor's place was on the job, he and he alone could face the Trisz fleet and gain for the racing Men the time they needed to complete the power circuit. Kor left the job in the hands of capable assistants and fled into space.

Space swarmed invisibly with the Men of the outpost patrols. Kor felt their presence everywhere as his mind lashed out in the vacuity of cold. His senses received a thousand reports at once that enabled him to beam his perceptions directly toward the oncoming fleet.

The enemy was as uncountable as the stars in the Milky Way. Grains of sand in the remote depths of space, they hung like a cloud swept on the wings of an incredible wind.

Kor's mind was filled with the high whistles of the Trisz-note, as he palped the plung-

ing ships. He sensed the crews of human, humanoid, and bizarre life forms pressed into service by the Trisz. He felt the presence of new and unheard of weapons, read their significance and potentialities from the minds of the officers commanding the fleet. In every vessel, the Trisz was present, a curious multiplicity of its single self, commanding, directing operations, laying the plans for the assault upon the gigantic power-worlds of the Men.

Kor linked his mind with the thousands who patrolled. He remembered with amusement his first experiments with hurling the Fire. To have linked his mind then with another would have been dangerous. It was different now, thanks to his new understanding of the infinite orders of rationalization. The other minds gave him added power, like dry-cells connected in series to form a battery. He had perfected the technique for this precise eventuality, knowing that, in the order of events as he had pre-determined them this conflict with the Trisz fleet was unavoidable, hence pre-determined as well.

Kor felt a curious, floating aloneness as he cast out the time-stasis field and his con-

scious self hovered free of the reaction he set in motion.

Three light years away, a sun of the great cluster erupted violently. Flames whorled on its surface, shot upward with dizzying speed and vanished into the darksome funnel of sub-space Kor created there. It would take three years for the blazing incandescence of that nova-like explosion to reach Kor's position—but he knew that it happened, and he knew when it winked suddenly out, though its ghost-image continued to blaze, and would continue so as its last departing radiation trailed for three long years through space at the snail's pace of light.

Like a broad fan of luminescence, clawed and fanged with the unleashed energy of a giant sun, the nova appeared in space ahead of Kor, between him and the light-years distant fleet. It spread slowly, seemingly gelid in the frigid non-temperature of space.

Another sun erupted violently in the cluster, was sucked into the sub-space funnel, and appeared lashing in the neighborhood of its brother sun, fanning out into the depths of space at the rate of millions of miles a second. That automaton of Kor's divisible mind worked automatici-

cally, hurling sun after sun toward the approaching fleet, until all of space was a seething cloud of berserk energy, a magnetic storm beyond description, through which no material thing could pass. Fleet as the ships of the Trisz were, it would take them six months to draw to a slow halt, alter their course, and by-pass the deadly barrier.

Of course, neither the Men nor the Triszmen could see the novas lashing together in space. It would take years for the light of the energy-cloud to reach either side. The Men could sense it with their naked minds—and the Triszmen possessed instruments that would detect the blazing mass in plenty of time.

Kor returned to his interrupted labors on the planet.

"That will hold them long enough," he communicated to Tor Shan. "I didn't have the heart to manifest those suns within the fleet. Those poor slaves are not to blame. As soon as our work here is finished, the Trisz will vanish from every one of those ships and the crews will be free of its influence. They will be glad enough to return to their home bases."

The work went on under the cold light of the stars. Kor himself brought the last wire

into position, welded it in place.

Tor Shan held Kor's hand, looked worriedly into his eyes.

"We have done everything possible? You are certain now?"

Kor nodded.

"Yes. It is time now for the Men to withdraw to the galaxy. The drain of energy will destroy space itself throughout this sector. I want none other here than myself."

"Remember," Tor Shan reminded him. "Your new body lies in a vault in Sub-den. Atom for atom, it is identical with this body whose hand I hold. When your work is done in the Trisz universe, return to us and live again to lead the Men into that brilliant future you have promised."

Kor smiled grimly. His pressure on the older man's hand was gratifyingly expressive of assent. Only Kor knew that he would not return, that something beyond the thin, almost indestructible barrier between the spaces, would hold him there, forever forbidding return . . . but he had not let them know, nor would he. Whatever that unknown thing was he had to face, he went forward willingly and gladly, knowing in the causative logic of his mind that

what he did set the Universe forever free of the Trisz.

The Scarlet Saints in a single surge vanished from the region of the star-cluster. Alone on the vast, darksome world wheeling in the midst of nebulosity, Kor prepared himself for the final act of his drama. There was no eye to watch him, no voice to shout a cheering huzza. The machine towered on a glassy, obsidian plain. This was the control center of the vast network of sub-etheric connections from world to world and star to star. The power of thousands of suns was linked here in this great machine that lifted lofty ramparts above the plain. It was the apex of man's technology, the culmination of the scientific and spiritual endeavor of the race.

Quickly, Kor fanned across the vast control board, checking and adjusting the settings of dials and verniers. He had not left this final setting to a subordinate. Too much depended upon accuracy. He placed himself in the operator's niche, a thousand feet above the plain, where shortly the violet arc of the dimension-penetrator would build itself into a ram of power that would punch a hole in space and time and let the enormous

energy of this cluster of stars pour through the rent into the universe of the Trisz.

Everything was in readiness. Kor strapped himself in the operator's niche with a silent prayer that amounted to a command. Nothing could go wrong now. Kor expanded his mind, felt it spring out, unwinding like a lash of steel, establishing the necessary contacts. Kor's conscious mind floated free, perceptions attuned, but helpless to guide further the automaton that automatically went through predetermined motions. Kor was aware that his physical self yanked a lever. The metal bar slid smoothly into place without a click in the airless void. For an instant, the wheeling Universe stood still —then all was dark, cold, and intensely silent.

No more could Kor perceive the glowing nebulosity of the wandering system, nor its thousands of glowing suns, like great arcs in the frosted sky.

The space of a vibrating electron away, his own Universe still existed, still blazed with the starry incandescence of its firmament. But the stars of the wandering cluster were dark, drained of their energy to the ultimate erg, lightless, lifeless —utterly destroyed.

The great machine among them on that frigid world Kor had left was a mass of molten metal, coruscating and sputtering in the eternal cold of space, already congealing around the material body of the Man Kor. And throughout all of that Universe Kor's mind had left, the Trisz vanished, cast out forever by that mortal thrust.

There was a flutter in the dark of his consciousness, a breathless stir of something that drew Kor's perception to a razor edge. His mind still expanded, flinging its influence ever outward into the universe and the encompassing energy-body of the Trisz. There were worlds here that had once been planets, and worlds that had once been suns, cold now and dead, forever wheeling in the empty dark, empty save for the frictionless fluid of the Trisz' being.

And something else was here. Kor paused to wonder. A whisper, a stir, a rustling call. Voices—he heard voices! Suddenly they began to rain in upon his consciousness, querulous, plaintive, hurling upon him from every side, until a gabble poured through his mind, that was like every tongue of the Universe, spoken aloud at once.

"Life!" murmured the voices.

"Life!" they yammered.

"Life!" they howled in a cacophony of wild celebration.

"Life has been brought among us!"

"We want life!"

"Give us life, O God!"

A canny voice, a cautious voice, but a thundering voice that rose above all the rest, cried out, "What is this life? Who brings life to this dead and nighted universe? Who comes here, and his life is not sucked away like ours? Who, I say—who?"

A sensation of chill settled upon Kor's expanding mind.

"It is I, the Man Kor. I have life," he returned. "Who questions my coming? Are you the intelligence of the Trisz?"

"Not I! We are the offal, thrown here in discard as our life was sucked into that intelligence you name. We seek life. . . ."

A glad cry broke upon the ringing tones of the voice, a familiar cry that set Kor back, caused his mind to sound with gladness.

"Soma!" he cried. "Soma! I hear you!"

He heard her, sensed her presence—but where was Soma? Where were the others who cried out, their voices like the beat of thunder that rolls

from cloud to cloud and bursts in the drenching rain?

"Kor!" Soma screamed that he might hear. "Kor—you have brought life with you! You have come to destroy the Trisz!"

There was nothing of the Trisz, no sound, no sight. Only the empty dark, and the voices that whispered and screamed, begging him for life.

"Quiet!" Kor thundered at them. "I will give you life, but you must be quiet!"

He knew now why he had known he would not return. He could have entered this universe, done his job, and returned with his precious life to animate the body in the vault of Sub-den. But here was the place for that spark of life, where mighty things might be done with it.

Now was the moment! Kor unleashed the flood of energy he bore. The time-stasis field leaped out, slowly at first, then faster and faster—faster than thought in the timeless reaches of this universe. The Trisz universe accelerated. Awareness grew in every atom and circling electron. Energy strained against energy within the body of the Trisz as the alien monster died. Supertitanic forces weaved from end to end of the universe, lashed with demoni-

acal fury. The universe awakened. Nebulae flared, spun like giant pinwheels against the forever dark. Mighty suns awoke, began to spin in a mad dervish-dance of life renewed. Pinpricks of light speared through the gloom that had been timeless. Time, returned to its domain, under the thrust of the time-stasis field, went mad. Aeons sped swiftly in an instant. Novae flared. Planets erupted from the womb of parent suns, congealed, grew air-envelopes, wheeled insanely in circling streaks of flaring light.

The universe blazed; its worlds hung fair and lifeless—fresh, new worlds that awaited the coming of life.

The voices took up their planet again, exclaimed with wonder, cried out with delight.

"Let us live! O, give us life!"

"Life, life!" they chanted. "Make us to live on these worlds of light!"

"There shall be Life," Kor said.

In warm seas, the ooze stirred in sluggish response to the command. Elements joined. A living cell crept out of the mud. Another followed. The cells divided, swifter than thought.

Life! The Word vibrated

throughout the universe. And life there was, on every steaming planet. The cells grew, divided, multiplied, coalesced, died, and were replenished. Minutiae swarmed in the seas, milled on the sunny shores. Algae formed, withered, grew again. Aeons passed. Grasses sprouted, leafed, seeded, died and rose again. Trees developed, shot lordly crowns heavenward. Everywhere the miracle of creation repeated itself through geologic ages.

The first animals came out of the seas on every habitable world throughout the universe, while the Word yet rang in the very structure of matter.

The universe was a silent blaze of wondrous light. Kor hung brooding and alone upon it. Where were the identities that had whispered and screamed? Where were those who prayed for life? The universe was bright, vivid, and silent.

Softly, Kor called out in the silence of his mind.

"Soma!"

"Kor!"

"I gave them light . . . I gave them Life. The Universe lives!"

"Yes, Kor. The Universe lives—because of you."

"Come," he said abruptly.

"There is a place for us, too!"

THE END

KILLER CAT

By KARL STANLEY

The menace was a gigantic ravening beast of a dim and prehistoric age. The man's weapons were puny and ineffective. But he had a courage born of the desperation with which even cave men protected their own. Would this courage stand against saber tusks and ten-inch claws? And what of the medallion suspended from the beast's neck?



The great cat roared and lunged.

HE CAME awake all at once. And though he did no more than open his eyes, every sense, every instinct, every muscle was ready for instant action. Something had disturbed the dreamless void of his sleep. The fingers of his left hand curled gently and surely about the haft of the stone knife while his right hand moved with slow patience toward the shaft of the throwing spear close to his side. And all the time his eyes, ears and nose probed the darkness about him.

Not the faintest shiver of moonlight broke the pitch of night.

From the instant of his awakening he had been aware that his woman was no longer at his side. He turned his head. She had rolled slightly from him and now lay on one side, the sleeping skin wrapped around her, one hand flung over her face, the other straight out in front of her pillowing her face. Beyond her, past the small family fire that was now cold ashes, a couple of children slept in a close embrace, a smaller sleeping skin giving them scant shelter against the dampness of the summer night.

A faint breeze brushed his cheek, and died. And now he knew what had awakened

him. Somewhere out there in the darkness, a man-eater prowled the jungle. The scent of the beast was strong in the man's nostrils. Usually they stayed away from the village compounds. This one must be very hungry. The man came to his feet in a single sinuous motion, muscles rippling on belly and legs. He stood straight, slightly above medium height, heavily built in leg and shoulders, thickly muscled there where his strength lay for the spear.

But why hadn't others caught the scent? He searched the friendly darkness close at hand. Not a single movement to show any but he had awakened. Even the sentry by the fire was asleep, forehead pillowed against the spear shaft gripped in both hands. And the tribal fire as dead in sleep as its guard. A look of contempt twisted the man's lips for an instant. It would never be said of him he had slept while on guard . . .

He did not think of awakening the others. He knew his own strength and skill and was willing to pit it against the beast's. Nor did the darkness frighten him. He had hunted alone and in darkness before. Was he not the strongest and bravest in the tribe?

He turned and moved off

into the night, knife in one hand, spear in the other, and about his waist the rope his woman had braided of jungle grasses.

Once he was beyond the shallow wall of trees he moved with new alertness. Now he was in jungle grasses high as his waist. To his right lay a path to water. The spoor of man was heavy there. To his left the thick odor of animal droppings made him pause momentarily. But the scent was not fresh. His eyes, now accustomed to the darkness, saw the wall of tangled jungle brush directly in his path. Once more the breeze came up, clammy as sweat in his face. And with it came the scent of the man-eater.

Stronger now, closer at hand.

He moved even more slowly. The wind was meeting him head on. The jungle closed all around him. Here and there were the rustle of smaller animals. To eat or be eaten, the rule of the jungle. Here the man-eater was king. Suddenly the long hair brushing the man's right cheek curled and moved. The man froze. The wind had changed direction. If the man-eater caught his scent he would do one of two things. He would move away

and swiftly. Or, if he were hungry enough, become the hunter instead of the hunted.

Again the wind changed, blowing a little more strongly now, heavy with promise. A storm.

The kill would have to be made quickly now.

The man moved onward with wary steps. He was like shadow, more silent than the smallest jungle thing. And suddenly he was in a tiny clearing. In that second he froze, held spellbound by what he saw. Ahead the distance of twenty bounds the man-eater lay pressed close to the ground, not even the flicker of a muscle to show life in the huge body. And it was a huge body, twice the length of the man.

Slowly, with movements that were a heartbeat's gentleness, the man circled until he was parallel to the beast. The man-eater was watching a small animal burrowing a passage into the moss-covered ground. The man recognized the animal as one of those who lived in the night. It was not a fighter and its only protection were great claws used in digging.

Then, with a scream that froze the smaller animal into absolute stillness, the man-eater leaped. Too late the prey

turned to run. A single swipe of a huge paw, a single crunch of teeth and the smaller animal's head hung limp from severed bone and muscle.

But now the decision had been taken from the man. The man-eater would have its fill. The man turned to leave. And broke a twig underfoot.

Man and beast turned toward each with the quickness of thought. The beast bounded forward. A half dozen leaps and it was in air in a last great jump. There was no time to throw the spear. The man went to his knees, thrust the spear into the ground, the stone head with its serrated edge pointing upward.

But the man hadn't time to plant the spear shaft firmly. And though the beast was caught by the spearhead it was only to tear a huge slicing wound in its chest. The spear bent and snapped where the stone head was bound to the shaft. And now the man had only his knife.

The man leaped directly at the man-eater who reared snarling, great paws held wide to embrace the man, jaw spread, huge teeth ready for the kill. But at the last instant the man swerved and came in from the side. The beast pivoted on hind quarters, front paws slicing toward the man.

The man came in under the paws, clutched at a clot of hair and swung himself onto the beast's back. The man-eater reared straight up, then fell backward, rolling to free itself. The man clung with tenacious blindness. Clung through the torture of the huge weight that crushed bone and flesh. He clung and struck with the stone knife, striving to sever the huge artery at the beast's throat.

And a great spurt of blood washed the man.

And in that instant before dying the beast freed himself of his burden. The man was flung crashing to the ground, stunned and helpless, the knife torn from his fingers. The man looked up to stare into slitted yellow eyes, to feel the heavy spittle-laden breath of the beast in his face. And like the beast he bared his own fangs and clawed upward at the beast's throat. The man-eater's head came down, the great inward curving fangs seeking the face below. But it was a blind search, blind as the yellow eyes. The head struck a handbreadth from the man's own face, struck and lay limp.

The man arose and shook himself. He moved away from the dead beast without so much as a single glance, his

eyes searching for the knife. Presently he saw it, and shortly after, the broken spear. He shook his head at the sight of the splintered shaft. At least three suns would go by before he could fashion another spearhead. He returned to the dead beast.

The night was almost gone when he returned to the compound. He dragged the huge shape behind him. Panting, he dragged the beast before the dead family fire, and sank to his haunches. He looked at the dead beast and then got down and looked closer, the thing around its neck. He hadn't noticed it before . . .

"Told them dad-blamed fools not to put the exhibit outside," the old man said.

"Think they'd listen to me." He gave a last brush with his cloth at the bronze tablet and opened the gate that looked like a tangle of vines. He bent forward and lifted the dead cat. Somebody's pet. Had a license on a chain around its neck. Evidently someone had thrown it over the fence. Heartless. It had got gashed to death someway. "Too bad," he muttered.

The bronze letters of the bronze plate gleamed in the sunlight . . .

. . . Scale model of prehistoric man and his cave dwellings . . .

The caretaker didn't notice the tiny spear by the warrior's side had its stone head missing . . .

THE END



"Oh, Martha—cut it out!"

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OF MEN AND BUGS

By DUANE C. MORTON

John was a practical joker—the kind most of us can do without very nicely. But Bernie was stuck with him. Bernie had a plan though, through which he would get rid of this villain who continually plagued him. He put the plan into effect. The results were not what he had expected. Oh well—the villain can't always lose. That just wouldn't be right!

BERNIE was a sad faced, small man who looked at life through a microscope most of his waking hours. He revolved around bugs and microbes and didn't care about much else. His place in the research lab was a small corner equipt with a maze of funny looking gadgets that meant nothing to anyone other than him and a few people higher up. Daily he came to his niche, looked at his bugs, made some notes, and drew conclusions from what he saw and wrote. Nothing more. He was the type of person whom you could trip over and still not notice.

Bernie roomed with another scientist in a small apartment. They were as alike as a steamroller and a

piece of mush. John was a rocket and missile man in the System, quite well-known and respected. It was his job to invent and test the kind of thing that is capable of doing away with the fellow man. In this he was excellent. Take, for instance, his Double Finite System. It worked on the principle of opposites attracting. A vapor wall would close in at opposite ends of a city, or whatever the System wanted to do away with and by their nature they would be drawn to each other. The forces that pulled them broke down the molecules in their path reducing the matter to nothing. Very simple, very devastating and very useful.

John was forceful in his work and forceful in his play.



Chaos and confusion took complete charge.

He thought nothing more fun than to poke at Bernie and his bugs. "How are the bugs behaving?" John would say. "They being good little boys and staying in their tubes?" Then he would roar with laughter. Bernie would only smile and go on reading.

John wasn't content to let it go at that. Press the matter. See how long it takes to get him mad.

Bernie didn't like to get mad and tried to close his ears to the rumblings from the other desk. He had to live there. The System decreed that all scientists live together and it was Bernie's unlucky lot to draw John as a roommate. Once the assignments were made they weren't changed. Bernie knew it and tried to keep the peace.

"I think this will do it," John said to himself aloud one night. "One whoosh and it's done."

Bernie took no interest.

"Yessir, one good slam and the System gathers another fumbling piece of property unto its growing bosom," John continued.

By now Bernie was aroused enough to ask the pertinence of the matter. "What are you talking about?" he asked.

John glanced up from his

drawing. He looked at Bernie and laughed. "Oh, it wouldn't interest you. Has nothing to do with bug culture."

"Sorry I asked," Bernie said, and dropped back to his book.

"Always the accommodating soul aren't you?"

"I try to be. You'd have smashed my head in long ago if I wasn't."

"Me!" John said feigning astonishment. "Not me. And leave the System without a good bug man? What would we do? We'd fall apart at the seams."

"Always the funny man aren't you? Always making with the jokes at my expense. I'm a shrimp compared to you and it would be an easy matter to slug me around. I can't get out of here and you know it and take advantage of it." Bernie talked in a quiet voice not even looking up from his book.

John was mentally smacking his lips over the fun he could have with this. "I'm not going to slug you around bug boy. I wouldn't lay a hand on you. I'll take my sport with a bit of sport if you know what I mean. Besides, the System doesn't like their bug boys mauled."

"Always the System man aren't you?"

"It got me where I am. I have no complaints."

"They've regimented you till the only thing you know is how to do away with people in masses and with little effort."

"I think you better watch your tongue bug boy." John was getting into high gear. "For that kind of talk I can turn you in."

"But you wouldn't." Bernie was still looking at the book. They had been through this a million times. John wouldn't turn Bernie in and they both knew it. It was too much fun for John. Why put Bernie away on the chance that he might draw a rocket man as a roommate, one who thought the same way he did. No more fun.

"Wouldn't turn you in?" John laughed. He got up from his desk and walked over to Bernie and stood looking over his shoulder. Bernie didn't budge a muscle. "I'd turn you in so fast you wouldn't know it until the next day."

"If you say so." Bernie sighed and tried to get back into his reading.

"Sure I say so. You cut out those cracks about the System. Without it where would you be? You ought to be damn glad they let you fool with those bugs every day. You

could be doing something useful you know."

The dam burst. Bernie had conditioned himself to take almost everything John could dish out, but cracks about the usefulness of his work were a little too much. Slowly he closed his book and turned and faced John. "I'm just as useful as you are." Still in a quiet tone. "My bugs as you call them may not seem so important as killing people but it serves its purpose. You say the System only does things that help the System grow. Did it ever occur to you that what I'm doing may be along those lines? In your stupidity on the matter you take pokes at it. All right. I'll take your stupid gags and your silly remarks but you watch your tongue about the usefulness of my work. It just may be me turning you in for the very thing you threaten me about." Bernie's jaw was set firm. His veins stood out.

John stared at him for about a minute. In a quiet tone he said, "I don't care about your work bug boy. I don't care about its usefulness. I care only about my work. But the cracks about the System have got to go, Doctor of Bug Culture. No one cares if I don't see your

point. They don't care if you don't see mine." He stopped, lit a cigarette, looked back at Bernie and shouted as forcefully as he could, "But they do care what you think about them!" Without another word he went back to his desk and sat down.

Bernie said nothing. He looked at John with hate in his eyes which John did not see. One of these days you're going to get yours big boy, he thought. You're going to get caught in your own trap. . . . Savagely he turned around in his chair and went back to his book.

Minutes later there was a knock on the door. John paid no attention. Bernie answered it. Standing in the doorway was a tall unemotional looking girl in the uniform of her Party.

"I want to see John, bug boy." She laughed as Bernie stood back and let her pass.

"Hi!" John said getting up from his desk, "Didn't expect to see you tonight. What's going on under that skull cap?"

"Have to see the drawings. Chief's orders."

"I just now finished them. How'd you know they would be done?"

"Let's leave it at a lucky guess." She glanced at Bernie

who was absorbed in his book and not paying any attention. "Still keeping the bugs in line?" she said.

"Of course," Bernie answered. It was a common thing for anyone coming in the door to inquire, in cynical fashion, the present status of his work.

"Great!" she exclaimed. "One of these days you'll have those bugs so well trained they'll march off and win a war for us."

"Don't ride the boy," John said. "He's beginning to bark back."

"I don't scare easy. Especially from bug boys," she remarked with a sneer.

"Somewhere we can talk?" she inquired. "Bugs give me the creeps."

"Mustn't say that," John said. "Bug boy threatened to turn me in for that."

She was amazed. "His echelon is so low he couldn't get a hearing with the clean-up crew."

"Come on, let's get out of here. I'm tired of arguing." He went to his desk and gathered up the drawings.

Bernie didn't turn to see them leave. He didn't acknowledge their acid comments. Why waste words on scum, he thought.

Bernie saw less and less of John. He guessed it was the new project. John came in late and was gone before he got up the next morning. No time to argue. This suited Bernie fine, He didn't have to listen to tirades and had time for deep concentration of his own projects. The papers grew higher on his desk. More and more writing and noting. John noticed it one night when he came in and laughed. To him it was just a lot of bug work for the perpetration of bugs. He couldn't have been further from the truth. To Bernie it was much more.

In his lab about six months later Bernie looked glowingly at the stack of plates before him. "You're just about ready my little friends. A few more days and you'll start taking your rightful place. His hands shook as he picked up the plates one by one and looked at them. His eyes were on fire with discovery. Here was his achievement. An achievement that would shake the very roots of the System. Now they will know me, he thought. Now they'll see me in a true light. A bug boy am I? Ha! The guy who plays with little bugs all day for no apparent reason. We'll see. I've played it your way

straight down the line. I've buckled under to your rules and acted like I enjoyed it. I've taken your insults and cynical comments and not fought back. You thought me just a small time bug boy who could be kicked around like so much dirt. Now it's my turn. Now my little toys become machines. Indestructible machines.

He thought of John. How surprised he would be. Why it was going to knock him down. And he wouldn't recover. Not this time. His acid little comments would be no more. John was going to go the way of his victims. John wasn't expecting it. That made it so much easier.

Bernie played the scene over in his mind.

John looking at him stupefied, wondering how this shrimp of a man had pulled this. How this blob of human being could so catch him unaware. Oh, John you stupid idiot. All the time you thought I was so dumb and incompetent. I wasn't. Not by a long shot. All the time I took your mouth and didn't fight back. Well, John boy, I had nothing to fight back with. Now I do. And I owe it all to my little bugs. Those things you dismissed as noth-

ing. The fatal mistake John.
Now it's your turn to squirm.

As Bernie stood in his lab
he was shaking with glee.
Carefully he put his friends
back in their warm cloisters.
Methodically he cleaned up
the stains on the instruments
and put them in their place.

When he arrived home
John wasn't there. Tonight
he would wait on him. He
was spoiling for an argu-
ment.

John got in at the usual
late time. He went to his side
of the room and started to
undress. He didn't notice
Bernie standing by the door
smiling. As he shed his shirt
he turned.

"What are you doing up
bug boy?"

Bernie said nothing. Just
smiled.

Getting no answer John
walked to the door. "I asked
you what you were doing up
so late?"

Still no answer. Just the
smile.

"One more second and I'll
slap an answer out of you."

"You wouldn't hit me,
John," Bernie said. "I'm not
worth it."

"What's the silent treat-
ment for?" He was mad.

"Why?"

"You been drinking?"

"Yes. From the cup of
success."

"You are drunk."

"I'm as sober as you are."

"Then wipe that silly grin
off your equally silly face."

"Why?"

John was confused. What
the hell's gotten into this silly
character, he thought. "Be-
cause it doesn't look like you
and it's out of whack."

"Is it, John?"

"Come to think of it maybe
it is right. Silly guy. Silly
smile." He turned to go to
wash. "Yeh, I guess it is
right."

Bernie let him take two
steps. "John," he demanded.

John turned. "Look I have
no time for your silly games.
I'm tired and sleepy. The days
are long. The night's short. I
don't want to waste what
small amount of time I have
on you."

"You'd like this, John," he
said softly. "You'd like it very
much."

"Why?"

"Because you would. . . .
Here." He pulled a small
round disk from his pocket
and handed it to John.

John looked at it and start-
ed to toss it in the waste
basket.

Bernie caught him. "You
don't want to throw that

away. It could mean something to you."

"Your silly bugs mean nothing to me."

"Look at it closely John."

"All I see is a little, bitty bug scrawling around inside a glass disk." He threw it in the basket.

Bernie fished it out quickly and followed John to the washbasin. "It's in your line of work."

John turned quickly and angrily. "I don't want, need or care about your bugs. Now let me alone."

"Try it once, John."

"All right. I can see I won't have a minute's peace until I play at least one round. What do you want me to do?"

"Take it out of the disk."

"Is that all!"

"Yes."

John unscrewed the cap and lifted the bug out and looked at it. "So?"

"Hold it a minute. Just a minute."

John held it for a minute. At the end of the minute he looked at Bernie with glazed eyes.

"Feel anything, John?"

"Funny."

"Move over to your desk."

John moved.

"Lift the pencil."

John lifted the pencil.

"Put the bug away."

John put it away.

"How does it feel, John?"

"I don't feel a thing," he said quietly.

"You're on the other end now, John. How does it feel?"

"Other end?"

"At long last, Bernie, the bug doctor has the upper hand."

"I feel nothing."

"Fine." Bernie was beside himself with joy. "You will get into bed and go to work in the morning and do your work and be yourself and dislike me like always. Tomorrow afternoon you will call me and have me come down. Then you will find a place for me in your organization and bugs will be helpful. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

John turned obediently and went to bed. Bernie shut out the lights and slept soundly.

All the next morning Bernie worked in his lab waiting. No call came. The first half of the afternoon was almost gone and still no call.

What went wrong, Bernie. Where did you slip up, he asked himself. Is all this work going for nothing. John can't still have the upper hand. He was almost to the point of distraction when the tiny phone in his office rang.

"Hello," he said quickly.

"Bernie boy, how are you? This is John."

"I'm fine, John. What can I do for you?"

"Can you come down here. I may have a place for you. Something very big."

"I'll be right down." He hung up. It had worked. It had really worked. No mistakes. The bugs had the power over men's minds. They had only to come in contact with a human being and you had them.

Bernie made it to John's in ten minutes. His pass was waiting for him. John greeted him at the door.

"That's fast work, Bernie. Good of you to come." He led the way down the hall to a large double door. He opened it. "Go on in, Bernie."

Inside were a maze of walls with dials and knobs and racing light screens. At the far side of the room was a glass panel separating the one room from the other.

John sat down at his desk; Bernie across the way.

"We have a big project under way here Bernie and I think you can be of great help."

"I'm glad to see you at last realize my usefulness."

"I'm sorry too. We could

have used you a long time ago if I'd only realized you were what we needed."

Bernie tried hard to contain his elation when he said, "That's all over. Let's forget it."

"Glad you feel that way."

Bernie, although completely sure of himself was taking no chances. He had brought his pet along. He slid the disk out of his pocket and handed it to John.

"That's one of your playmates I was fiddling with last night," John said.

"That's right."

"Very nice. Cute little bug."

John picked up the disk. "If you'll come with me I'll show you what you have to do."

"Fine," said Bernie. "Show the way."

John opened the door to the room on the other side of the glass panel. Inside were only a desk and a chair. The four walls were bare except for a small hole coming out of each.

"Sit down here, Bernie," said John showing him to the chair.

Bernie sat down. John was fumbling with the lid to the disk.

"I can't seem to get this lid off, Bernie. I want to look at the bug."

"Here let me help you," said Bernie obligingly. Carefully he slid the lid off and handed it back to John.

"Cute thing," said John and shoved the disk and bug into Bernie's face and held it. "Don't move."

Bernie sat silent.

"You forgot one thing, Bernie boy. This thing can work both ways. I was supposed to hate you today, remember. I do. I was supposed to act normal. I am. Now sit there and don't move." He walked from the room, tossing the disk over his shoulder. On the other side of the glass John could see Bernie sitting and not moving. He pushed a button and a moment later the door behind him opened. The girl who had visited at the apartment

walked in very slowly.

"Is he here?" she asked.

John merely pointed.

"Is everything ready?"

"All ready. All I need to do is push the right button."

"Go ahead," she said.

John pushed the button. From far off a hum sounded. Bernie disappeared from the chair. The room was bare except for the table and chair and the four holes in the walls.

"Works fine doesn't it," said John.

"Better than the vapor wall. We don't have to rebuild the buildings now. It gets rid of those against the System, which is what we want. It works fine."

"Perfect," said John with a victorious smile. "Just perfect."

THE END



A TRIP TO ANYWHEN

By IVAR JORGENSEN

Want to see the hanging gardens of Babylon? Care to spend an afternoon at the Roman games in the Colosseum? Or perhaps a jaunt back into the pre-Cormagnan days where you could watch Man discover fire? Okay? Fine, but one thing—you'll have to wait until Time of Your Life Tours is organized. It won't be long now.

THE sign on the door, in gold-bordered black letters on pebbled glass, said:

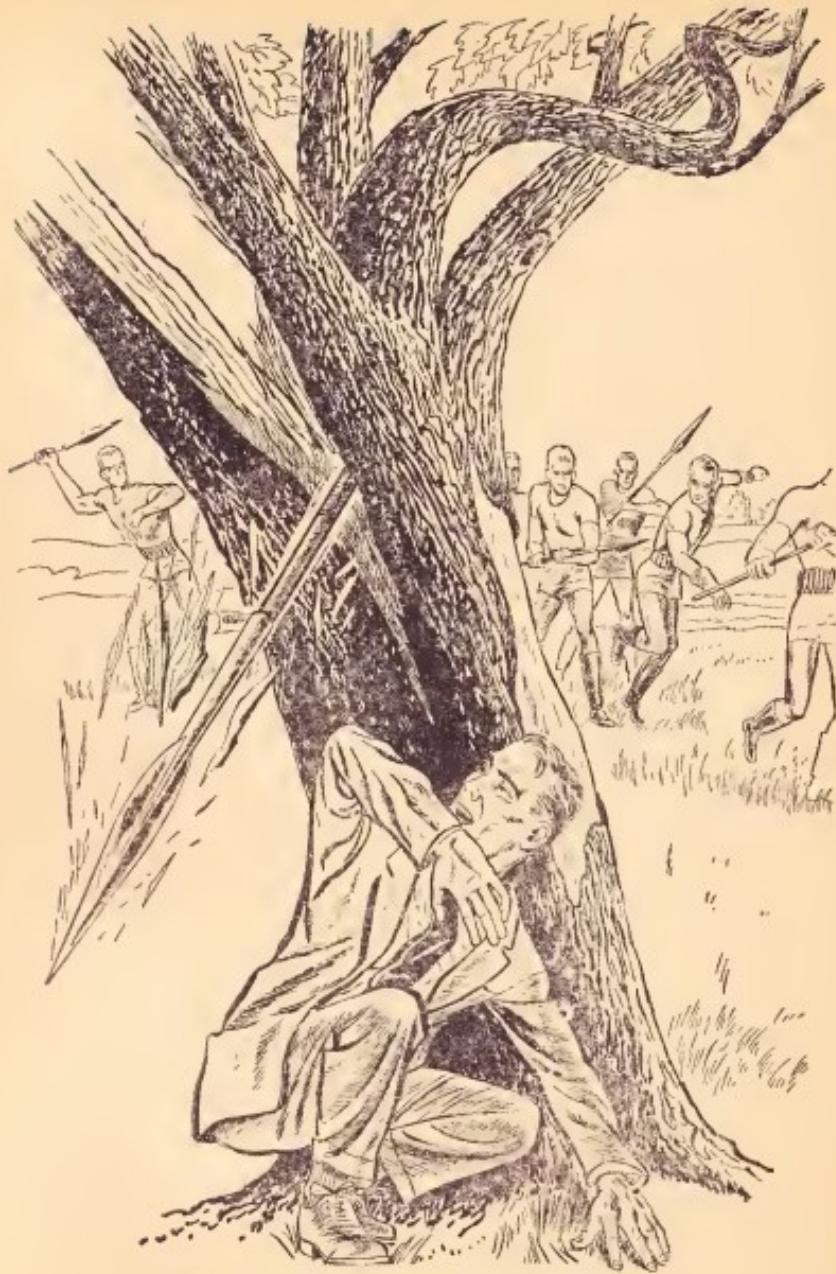
**TIME OF YOUR LIFE
TOURS, INC.**

The office was on the twenty-second floor of a first-rate office building in midtown Manhattan, and in my business I don't get to see too many first-rate office buildings. I'm a private dick—not exactly giving old man Pinkerton gray hair, but it's a living.

I opened the door and waded across a carpet deep enough to hide mice in. There were murals on the wall and

right away I began to figure it was some kind of history club. I'm not a bug on history or archaeology, but when I see pictures of Egyptian pyramids and Doric Grecian temples and Sancta Sophia and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, I recognize them.

Sitting surrounded by all this history and holding down a circular desk was the kind of girl that belongs in a first-rate office building. She had hair which once would have been called strawberry blonde but now the name if not the color is out of fashion. These days they call it copper. She had the deepest blue eyes I have ever seen. She was beau-



The large spear ripped through the tree.

tiful and while the high round desk hid her figure from the ribs down, what you could see of her body in a shimmering blue dress as tight as a corn husk fits an ear of corn was every bit as breath-taking as the face.

I handed her my calling card and studied her while she studied it. "Mr. Elgin," I said. "I have an appointment with him."

Her eyes met mine and she said, "You're supposed to look at the pictures, not the receptionist."

"I've seen pyramids and things before."

"But not actual photographs of what they looked like in their heyday."

"Are you trying to tell me—"

She gave me back the card and said, "I'm not trying to tell you anything. If your eyes are retractable please pull them in while I tell Mr. Elgin you are here, Mr. Cabot."

She had taken the round on points, so I retreated to my corner and waited for the bell. After a while she said, "Down the hall and through the first door on your left, Mr. Cabot."

I was halfway down the hall before I realized something was funny. The office. It was a large suite of rooms

and it must have cost them plenty, but there wasn't a customer or a client in the large waiting room and the place looked so neat it didn't seem there had ever been one. Except for the gorgeous receptionist there didn't seem to be another employee of *TIME OF YOUR LIFE TOURS, INC.*, either, except for Mr. Elgin, who I was going to see. There had to be a catch somewhere.

Otherwise, this whole layout was for my benefit.

I knocked on Mr. Elgin's door and a deep voice told me to come in. The office was completely devoid of furniture. It was big and bare and my footsteps echoed as I walked across it. Mr. Elgin sat, yogi-fashion, in the middle of the floor. He was smoking a cigar and incredibly the cigar smelled exactly like roast chicken.

"Mind if I finish my lunch?" he asked politely between puffs.

I looked at the cigar. It was a little yellowish for a cigar, but it looked more like a cigar than it did like roast chicken. The smell was still there, though. Every time Elgin exhaled, I got a whiff of it. Roast chicken. And no tobacco smell at all.

"Hearty appetite," I said, going along with the gag.

Elgin appraised me and said, "You're cool, Cabot. I guess in your line of work you have to be."

"In my line of work you have to be whatever the client wants. You might say my line of work is trouble. Other people's trouble."

"Well, I have plenty of it, Cabot."

"Shoot," I said, and gave the prospective client a good looking over. He was a big fellow who could have filled a man of distinction and to perfection. He had close-cropped salt and pepper hair and a hard handsome face. I put him somewhere between forty-five and fifty. He had enormous shoulders and a thick chest, but he wasn't dressed right. On the receptionist I had called the garment a dress. But it wasn't a dress. He was wearing one too and on him it was simply a close-fitting sheath which bisected itself to slacks on either leg.

"Masquerade?" I said before he could begin his story.

"It would be a masquerade," Elgin assured me, "if I were wearing what you're wearing."

"Is that supposed to mean something to me?"

"I hope it does before we're finished here."

"Go ahead, Mr. Elgin."

"*TIME OF YOUR LIFE, INC.* has lost one of its cruise ships," Elgin began. "We want you to find it."

"Where do you cruise to?"

"Oh, just about all over. Thebes in Egypt, Periclean Athens, Chichen Itza under the Mayans, Sumer and Akkad, Ur of the Chaldees, the Battle of Waterloo, the Signing of the Magna Carta, the Battle of Hastings, the Assassination of Caesar, the Battle of Iwo Jima, the Building of the Tower of Babel, the Dropping of the First A Bomb on Hiroshima, the Battle of Heartbreak Ridge, the Death of Hitler. Just about anywhen."

"Any what?" I said.

"Any when," he repeated, making two words out of it this time. "*TIME OF YOUR LIFE* means exactly that, Mr. Cabot. We take guided tours through time."

"Look, Jack," I said, getting sore because I thought he was pulling my leg, "if you have a case for me, I'm interested. But if this is someone's idea of a practical joke—"

"Relax, Mr. Cabot. I assure you I would have no reason under the sun to play a joke

on you, although, in a way, a sham has been attempted."

"So now it comes out."

"But only in one respect. This is a vacant suite of rooms, Mr. Cabot. You have been hypnotized to accept the furniture in the waiting room as real but you'll notice there's no furniture here in this room. We didn't want to fool you: we merely wanted you to accept us. You see?"

"What about this receptionist?" I asked.

Elgin smiled for the first time. "Real enough, I assure you. Shall we go on?"

I said we should go on.

"Dru is the pilot of the missing time-ship," Mr. Elgin said. "She's the girl outside. She had taken a six-man tour of V.I.P.s in our own age—"

"Which is when?" I asked, although I believed none of it so far.

"Fourteen hundred years in the future, but that isn't important. Anyway, she took the V.I.P.s back here, to the mid-twentieth century. Prometheus Tours, our chief rival, thought this would be a splendid opportunity to discredit us. Accordingly, the time-ship was hijacked with its six V.I.P.s aboard. Dru was left here in your century. She contacted me and I came

running in a two man scouting."

"What do you need a private detective for?" I said. "I don't know a damn thing about time travel. I don't even know if I really believe you or not."

"Because one of us, either Dru or myself, has got to stay here when the time ship is shuttled back. The other one might need some help."

"So why not recruit it from your own century?"

"Because we're trying to keep this thing quiet. Because I don't even want my own staff to know. Because time travel is under attack by certain anti-progress organizations in our own day and I don't want to give them fuel for their fire, as you would say. Will you help us?"

"My rates are fifty dollars a day plus expenses," I said, although I would have settled for half of that.

"Splendid. I'll have Dru make you some money right away."

"Make it, did you say?"

"Why yes, of course. *TIME OF YOUR LIFE* can't be expected to have on hand currency for each of a thousand civilizations that might be visited. We make our own money as it is needed."

"No," I said, "thanks."

"We don't counterfeit it. We make it."

"There's a difference?"

"In this case there is. The money we make is perfect money. Your Treasury Department experts couldn't tell it apart from the real thing. Here, I have a few bills in my pocket." He took out two twenties and a ten and gave them to me. I'm no expert but they looked like the real thing.

I returned them to Mr. Elgin and shook my head, saying, "If this is some kind of elaborate stunt to pass out counterfeit money, it sure is a new one on me."

"I already told you the money is as good as real. Do you want the job or don't you, Mr. Cabot? Prometheus Tours is desperate because we've been taking away a good deal of their business. If they can successfully discredit us—"

"Sure. I'll take the job." What the hell, I thought, I wasn't working at the moment. I had nothing to lose. And a private eye is liable to meet almost anything . . .

"Splendid. You'll be going after the missing tour ship with Dru. I'll wait here to shuttle you in, if and when."

"Where did the tour ship go? Where was it taken?"

"Our tracking devices show

it was taken to Southern Europe."

"Southern Europe? Which country?"

"Not in this age, Mr. Cabot. Southern Europe some time ago."

"Well, which country?"

"I'm afraid they had no countries then. Southern Europe twenty thousand years ago."

"Twenty!" I said.

"Miss Dru is waiting for you."

She was waiting but she didn't seem happy about it. "You're joining me?" she said.

"Right."

"But do you believe?"

"Does it matter if I believe or not?"

"Not right away it doesn't."

"If you prove it to me, I'll believe. Hell," I said, "if I told you I was flying off to the nearest star or something, would you believe me?"

"Yes, of course. That's old stuff. We've had interstellar travel for three hundred years. Nothing to see, though, so we turned our attention to time."

"I guess I should have kept my mouth shut."

"Well, are you all set?"

I patted the Magnum .357 in the shoulder harness I

wore. It has a smaller bore than a .45 but it makes a bigger hole. "As all set as I'll ever be," I said.

I expected Dru to get up and lead the way to their time machine. Instead, she beckoned me to the desk. It was a large round desk and she sat in the middle of it in a space big enough for one person easily and big enough for two in a tight squeeze.

"Come on in," Dru said.

I vaulted the desk like a high hurdles man at the 1956 Olympics. My arm got in the way so I had to put it around Dru's shoulder. It was more crowded in there for the two of us than rush hour on the IRT subway. I smiled at Dru but she didn't smile at me.

"Time travel," she said pedantically, "is based upon the principle of a space-time continuum. You're familiar with the term?"

"Yeah," I said, staring at Dru's face which was about two inches from my own. She was a tall girl and although it was hard to focus at this distance, she seemed prettier than ever.

"There operates in the universe," Dru went on, "a law of conservation of matter and energy. Nothing is ever lost. Matter may be converted to energy: if that happens vio-

lently, we call it an atomic explosion. Energy may be converted to matter and if that happens under sufficiently mysterious circumstances, we call it creation. The point is, nothing is lost. The matter-energy continuum is conserved. Now, since matter-energy on the one hand and space-time on the other are continuous and identical throughout the universe, it follows that neither space nor time can be lost, in the same way that neither matter nor energy can become lost. You followed what I said so far?"

I nodded my head. That brought my chin in contact with the crown of Dru's head because she had leaned down to do something to the bank of controls.

"How does an ordinary space traveling device get from place to place in space —say an automobile or an airplane or a spaceship?"

"Why, by moving of course."

"Not of course, Mr. Cabot. By moving, yes. But through what medium? To travel in space, you move through time! There is no such thing as instantaneous travel, is there? Even light, the fastest known thing in the universe, travels at the finite speed of 186,000 miles per second. If

you want to go by car from here to, say, Washington, D. C. you say it will take you about six hours. That is, in traveling across a certain distance of space, you travel through time. Right?"

"If you put it that way, yes."

She did something to the controls. The room began to blur. It spun and turned a uniform gray color, murals and all. I felt no sensation of motion but figured we were traveling if what Dru told me, or even a little bit of it, was true.

"In the same way," she said, "to travel through time you must move through the medium of space. Where is yesterday, Mr. Cabot?"

"I guess I flunk your course, teacher. You got me."

"Well, consider this. The Earth spins on its axis and the Earth goes around the sun and the sun is moving freely through space, taking the Earth and all the planets with it in the general direction of the constellation Hercules. But this whole sector of galactic space, the sun and Hercules included, is spinning around the galactic center at a fixed rate of speed. In addition, the galaxy is itself drifting through space.

It also belongs to a small local cluster of galaxies called a first level supergalaxy, which is moving through space. This first level supergalaxy belongs to a cluster of first level supergalaxies called a second level supergalaxy, and that has its own motion through space too. Then there is—"

"I get the idea," I said.

"Now, a time ship must somehow backtrack—simultaneously, of course, since to travel in time you travel through the medium of space, not the medium of time—on all those separate paths at once. That's precisely what we're doing at the moment."

"I thought you said it was simultaneous."

"It is, once we get underway. We must accelerate and slow down, though."

Overhead, a light suddenly blinked on and off. I said nothing. I was—for the moment—not even interested in Dru the way I had been interested in her at first. My head was whirling. The way she told it, I was beginning to believe.

Later, Dru said: "Well, here we are."

It still looked like a large circular desk to me. I climbed out and helped Dru over the

side. She came lithely and for the first time I had a good look at her figure. All of it. The curves of the space-time continuum had nothing on her. I'd have followed her to the crack of doom if the spacetime ship or whatever the hell it was would have taken us that far.

"Look around you," Dru said.

She had a point. I unfastened my eyes from her and gazed around. We were in a broad valley and the valley was surrounded by low green hills and the low hills by higher hills, azure hills, and off in the distance the azure hills were topped and ringed by purple mountains. A stream came tumbling and bubbling down from the mountains and the hills and frothed by almost at our feet. The big circular desk looked about as out of place as a Woolly Mammoth in Macy's window.

"What Prometheus Tours is probably going to do," Dru said, reminding me I was on a case, "is this. They'll hold the V.I.P.s back here and never let on they're from Prometheus, not from *TIME OF YOUR LIFE*. The V.I.P.s will naturally be angry at the inconvenience. Probably the Prometheus people will pre-

tend their time traveling mechanism is broken down."

"Do you know where they are?"

"About two miles from here, on the first level of hills to your left."

"So we go over there, confront them and—"

"There's one thing you don't understand, Cabot. When time travel was invented, a whole new set of laws was promulgated to cover it. One such law is this: time crime cannot be punished by my own century. Time crime must always be tried and punished by the laws of the century visited."

"But back here there's no civilization," I said. "So obviously there are no laws."

"Now you're catching on. That means the Prometheus people can do anything they want to further their ends. Even if they murdered us in the process, they couldn't be touched for it."

"You didn't say anything about this back in the 20th century."

"We wanted you to come."

"I'd have come," I said.

We began to walk toward the hills. I wondered about the Prometheus people up there, but didn't say anything. They would be able to see us coming

from a long way off. If they were desperate and if they could get away with anything as Dru said, it could be a dangerous situation.

I pointed this out to Dru and she shrugged and said, "That's why we hired you. To help us. What do you think we ought to do?"

"I don't think we should have landed right out there in the middle of the valley like that, but it's too late to cry over that now. I don't think we ought to walk straight across the open valley. I think we ought to seek cover of some kind. I—"

Just then something whistled by my ear and thunked into the trunk of a tree. It was a spear nearly ten feet long and whoever had been able to throw it like that would have made me look like a midget although I'm six feet tall and push a good two hundred pounds.

I got down in the tall grass and dragged Dru down beside me. She didn't say anything but she was breathing hard. For the first time I thought she was afraid. I put my hand on her shoulder. She was trembling.

After a little while the sound of many footsteps came across the valley. I got up on hands and knees and, crouch-

ing like that, chanced a look over the tall grass.

There were about a hundred of them. They were naked. They carried spears and half of them were men and half women. They all looked like heroic statues done by Praxitiles or Michelangelo, men and women included. If I could judge it at this distance, the men were all close to seven feet tall. The women were strapping six footers but looked puny next to their mates. The men must have weighed a cool two hundred fifty pounds each.

They came forward in a wide line, single file, ten feet or more between each figure. They were beating the tall grass with their spears. It took a few seconds for the idea to penetrate and when it did the hackles rose on the back of my neck. They were beating the grass—for us.

"The way they're beating the grass," I said, "they couldn't miss us."

"Who are they? I can't see a thing."

"Savages. Cavemen, probably. If they come on us all of a sudden, by thrusting a spear in and making us yell, they're liable to be violent."

"How far away are they now?"

"Not more than a hundred yards."

"You think we ought to reveal ourselves, Cabot?"

"I think we better."

I took her arm. She was still trembling when we stood up. The savages whooped something I didn't understand. They began to trot. They took enormous ground-covering strides. It would take them only a few seconds to reach us. They waved their spears and made thrusting motions with them and I didn't know who looked worse, the men with their shaggy beards and huge muscles or the women with their matted hair, yellow-toothed grins and hard flat muscles.

I showed my hands at them, palms outward. Universal gesture, I told myself. Relax. You have nothing to worry about. Everybody knows the universal gesture for peace.

Everybody?

These jokers didn't. They kept coming and I thought we were done for. I didn't reach for my Magnum .357 revolver. It would have been futile. Defiant, sure, but while there was a chance—even a microscopic chance—they would change their minds, I didn't want to die defiantly.

At the last moment, they reversed their spears. Apparent-

ly only the points were sharp, for they held the edges. The hafts were as thick as the meat-ends of baseball bats. They swung them easily as they came, like baseball players leveling at the pitcher. But the spears were ten feet long and there wasn't any pitcher. There was us.

Dru screamed something. It was the last thing I heard for a long time. One of the men swung his spear around, haft foremost, and he hit both of us with it. He swung it easily but it blurred at us with incredible speed. Had he swung it harder, he would have taken our heads off. As it was, the space-time continuum opened up a yawning chasm beneath our feet and I tumbled in with Dru. I shouted to her to catch on to something but the shout echoed and echoed from infinite distances. The infinite distances were all inside my skull. I lost consciousness.

"Are you all right?" Dru said, much later.

"No. My head feels like they were using it for a gong."

"Mine too. I—I'm afraid to open my eyes, Cabot."

I opened mine. The place was a cave. It was very warm in there and flickering crimson light bathed us. We sat near a fire. I could see the

shadows of the cave people at the outer edge of the circle of light cast by the fire, but they didn't come any closer. Since there was a considerable chill in the air, I decided it was because they were afraid of the fire. It might be important and I wanted to find out.

I stood up and for a moment my head whirled dizzyly.

"What are you going to do?" Dru wanted to know.

Instead of answering her, I grabbed a brand from the fire and advanced with it. You could hear the slap-slap-slap of the cave peoples' feet as they beat a hasty retreat. When I put the brand down, the shadows came back after a while.

"It's something to know," I said. "They're afraid of the fire."

"Of their own fire?" Dru said, surprised.

"It looks that way. Well, what do we do now? We could probably get out of here if I use a brand to scare them off."

"I don't know, Cabot. The Prometheus people probably had them bring us here. Maybe we'd better see them."

"O. K.," I shrugged. "But just in case what you said about them being able to get away with murder back here

is correct, I'll keep this brand ready. If they get tough, we can always stampede the cavemen."

A voice said: "That would be foolish. They might trample you, too." It wasn't Dru's voice. It was a man's voice.

The cavemen moved aside in awe to let him pass. You could tell it was awe the way they shouldered one another out of the way. They regarded the newcomer exactly as they regarded the fire: it was something which would do them a lot of good but they were afraid of it.

"I know him," Dru whispered. "That's the president of Prometheus Tours. If he's back here, this must be important."

"I thought you said they were merely trying to discredit *TIME OF YOUR LIFE*."

"Yes, but—"

"You have recruited help from some other age?" the president of Prometheus Tours asked. "You know the statutes forbid it."

"They also forbid time kidnapping," Dru said coolly, "but that didn't stop you."

"When is this man from?"
"Twentieth century."

The president didn't comment on that. He was a tall fellow and cadaverously thin

with parched skin as dry as cured leather. "Quick is my name," he said, looking at me directly for the first time.

I offered him my hand and at first he didn't understand the gesture. Then he mumbled something about the twentieth century and shook hands with me. Dru said, "You can't get away with it, Mr. Quick. Where are you hiding the people you've kidnapped? And where's our cruise ship?"

Quick laughed. It was a surprisingly rich, booming laughter for such a thin man. He said, "Do you think I'd have given this matter my personal attention if we were simply trying to discredit the rival tour service? Do you think I have nothing better to do with my time?"

Dru didn't say anything. The cavemen were coming back toward the fire in groups of two or three, carefully, anxiously. Every time the fire leaped and danced they would beat a hasty retreat again. For a long time it was strictly two steps forward and one step back for them.

"I'm listening," Dru said finally.

"Are you wondering why they fear the fire?" Quick asked us. "I'll tell you why. Because it's new to them. I

feel something like a god right now. I've given them fire. I've started them up the long path toward civilization."

"That's ridiculous," Dru said. "They've always had fire. Lightning fells a tree in the forest and the rain doesn't fall. The tree burns. They know fire."

"Sure," Quick said. "Of course they do. But they don't use it. Don't you see the difference? They've seen animals. They hunt animals. But they don't domesticate them. That's still several thousand years off. They also eat fruits and berries and even wild grains, but they don't cultivate them. That's also several thousand years off. Thus they have just begun to domesticate fire, with my help. They have changed from an utterly barbaric, nature-dependent people to a people embarking on the first stage of civilization, thanks to me. You see?"

Dru was about to reply, but I was reasonably certain she'd go off on some theoretical tangent. To get to the point, I asked Quick, "What's in it for you?"

"You have a very practical friend," Quick told Dru.

I repeated my question.

"If they have now domesticated fire with my help, and

if that will lead to the domestication of animals and the cultivation of crops, and so to civilization. Look at it another way. I have domesticated them."

"What did you say?" Dru demanded.

"I have domesticated these simple cavemen in the same way as their progeny will learn to domesticate animals."

"But what in the world for?"

Quick's laughter came in another loud peal. "Time travel," he said, and sneered. "We're soft. We've always been a soft people, I suppose. Too much civilization too long. No wars. No unemployment. No disease. Is it any wonder we're soft? We develop time travel all right, but what do we do with it?"

"I'll tell you what we do with it," Dru said coldly. "We use it the way human beings should use a great discovery like time travel. Our historians get the facts accurately for the first time, all the facts anywhere, anywhen. Our anthropologists and archaeologists do the same. If there's any time travel machinery left over—as there's bound to be because we're a productive people—we make a touring and vacation industry out of it. But we've been careful not

to exploit any of the past ages. So far, Mr. Quick, time travel hasn't hurt anyone."

"Hasn't benefitted anyone, you mean."

"I won't argue that point with you. But don't you understand that exploitation of the past ages won't only hurt them. It will hurt us as well."

Quick shook his head. "I've heard that argument before."

"Well, it's the truth. How do you intend to exploit the past ages, assuming you domesticate them?"

"For minerals and other raw materials, mostly."

"That's what I thought. But look, Mr. Quick. Every ton of coal you take out of a neolithic mine means one ton less in civilized times, when it will be really needed. For every ton of iron, of copper, of aluminum, the same. For every barrel of crude oil, every—"

"You've made your point," Quick said.

"Well, I won't let you get away with it."

"You think we hijacked your time cruiser? You think we kidnapped your six V.I.P.s? Don't be a little fool. They came willingly. They wanted to see what domestication of a past age could mean for our own civilization. Sure,

their original idea was a vacation. *TIME OF YOUR LIFE* was taking them on a meaningless junket into the past. I've given their junket meaning. They realize that. If they back me financially, we'll start a new era, tapping the past to benefit our own age. They haven't been kidnapped. They've seen an opportunity to get in on the ground floor, and they want to take it."

"Why don't we ask Mr. Cabot what he thinks?" Dru said. "The twentieth century was the century of greatest exploitation, wasn't it?"

"Don't look at me," I said. "The free world wasn't doing the exploitation in the twentieth century. The free world realized that people had the right of self-determination in the nineteenth century. The Commies now, they're different. But I wouldn't know how a Commie mind operates."

"But they've proven themselves harmful to the subject areas?" Dru said.

"Hell, yes. It looks like we may have to fight a war because of it." Suddenly, I was very eager. I added: "Hey, you're from the future. You know. You *know*. You could tell me all about that war, if it has to be fought, if we win it—"

Dru shook her head. "We

can't tell a past people their own future. It's against our statutes."

"But—"

"I can put it in vague terms, though. If a war has to be fought—and I'm not saying it has to—you won't lose. How's that?"

"Ambiguous," I said. "But better than nothing. Say, Dru," I went on, "it looks like I'm no longer working for you."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean Mr. Quick didn't kidnap anybody."

"Still—"

"Listen," Quick said. "I don't want to be your enemy. There is room for *TIME OF YOUR LIFE* in the new scheme of things, too. Prometheus Tours—Prometheus Enterprises now, by the way isn't big enough to handle the entire operation."

"Not interested," Dru said. "And I'm not even sure I can believe you. Can you take me to *TIME*'s six passengers?"

Quick nodded. "Why not?" he said. "They're taking a tour of the silver mines we've opened back here—"

"Silver?" Dru gasped. "Before they've mastered fire? Before they've even dreamed of domesticating animals?"

"Silver is the basis of our currency, isn't it? We need

silver. Whoever corners a rich supply of new silver will be a powerful figure in our own civilization. You understand that, don't you?"

"I only understand you're exploiting these people."

Quick shrugged. "Let's take a look at the silver mines."

Dru raised her eyebrows at me. I nodded and she offered me her hand. We followed Quick through the crowds of cavemen who were gawking at the fire and outside.

The silver mine was located higher in the hills. It was almost dusk when we reached the place with Quick leading the way. Purple shadows cloaked the steep, rocky hill-sides but somewhere up ahead an unnatural glow glared in the sky.

"The mining methods are primitive," Quick admitted. "But these are primitive people. And if you give them such things as fire and trinkets, and a modicum of medical care, and a little whiskey, there are no wages."

We scrambled like mountain goats up the remaining few yards of steep slope between us and the entrance to a large cave. The orange glow came from there, pulsing out into the dusk. You could feel the choking, oven-like heat

from a considerable distance. Outside the cave entrance, a few dozen cavemen were squatting on their haunches and sweating—and drinking. The bottles were unmarked but the effect of the contents upon some of the savages, who were dancing and yelling and fighting one another despite the intense heat, was unmistakable.

So was the look on Dru's face. Quick saw it and said, "Now tell me you don't drink alcoholic beverages!"

"I drink them," Dru said. "I like them. But this is different. These people are savages. You gave them fire but they don't understand fire. You give them whiskey, and they don't understand whiskey either."

"They'll manage," Quick snorted, and led us inside.

It was hot in there. It was fantastically, enervatingly, devastatingly hot. The very walls of the cavern seemed on the point of melting. The savages were plodding back and forth barefoot, from the depth of the cave to the outside and back again, sweat pouring from their bodies. They were carrying great flat pans of blasted rock and behind them there was a hissing and billowing of hot

steam and an occasional loud explosive sound.

Quick led the way without talking. Talk would have sapped our energy unnecessarily. We plodded through the steam and dimly I was able to see the natives staggering by. The natives. Our ancestors and Dru's and Quick's. The ancestors of a large segment of the human population of future generations. Enslaved before they had tasted the fruits of their own civilization.

They lighted huge fires against the naked rock walls of the cavern's interior. You could see they feared the flame, but Quick had showed them how it would warm them in the bleak cold interiors of their sleeping caves and Quick had also given them a sample of his whiskey and although they feared the fire, they worked with it.

After the rock was superheated, other cavemen rushed up with skins and bladders of large animals, probably mastodons. The skins and bladders were distended with water and the water was flung upon the red-glowing rock. In the red of the rock, veins of silver gleamed metallically. When the water struck the hot rock it hissed into steam instantly and the

rock cracked explosively, shards flying, massive chunks groaning and falling to the cavern floor.

The cavemen came up with their pans. They were sweating and they were trembling with fear and uncertainty but they moved forward to get their ore and then retreated toward the entrance with it.

"You're making animals out of them," Dru accused.

Quick shook his head. "I've given them fire."

"You've given them whatever you thought they would need to help you."

"Why don't you ask your friends? They're here somewhere."

"I'm going to ask them," Dru said. "But even if they agreed with you they wouldn't change my mind. Don't you see what you're doing? These people attacked us when we came. Why?"

"Because I told them to. Because I wanted to show you my control over them."

"You're insane. If they obey you, they'll obey any other strong leader, anywhere, anytime. You're not giving them civilization. You're just teaching them how to be slaves."

Quick sneered. He was very good at sneering. The sneer fit his face. He was a cynical man who had seen too

much of civilization and too much of man's successful conquest of his environment. He was cynical and I thought he was going to be dangerous, very dangerous, because he was cynical.

In a few moments, six other time travelers joined us. They were sweating with the heat of the fire and when they saw Dru they seemed embarrassed.

"Did you go with him of your own free wills?" she asked them.

One after another, they nodded. They seemed too sheepish about it to speak. "That wasn't very ethical," Dru said.

"He painted such a glowing picture," a portly man with a bald head told her, "that we had to find out for ourselves."

"And did you find out?"

"Well—" the portly man began.

"Go ahead and tell me," Dru said.

"In everything that's new as this venture of Mr. Quick's is new, there is some good and there is some bad. Do I like exploitation? Does any man living in a civilized democracy like it? But factors must be weighed. When they are weighed and you decide what must be held in the balance—"

"Why don't you tell him to can it," I suggested to Dru. "It sounds to me like your friend is a stuffed shirt."

"What?" the fat man gasped, but Dru was grinning. She said:

"I'm beginning to like you, Cabot. You have a way of getting to the bottom of things in a hurry."

I shrugged. "You people have fourteen hundred years of thinking and civilization on me, but what the hell, thinking and civilization aren't anything."

"You mean you can understand human nature better than we can?"

"Better than you? I don't know. But a man in my business has got to make snap judgments about people."

"Mr. Quick," the fat man said, "I want it known that after what has been said here, I'm on your side."

Quick grinned. Evidently the fat man was his first convert. "What about the rest of you?" he asked. "Still thinking?"

They conversed together in whispers. The general consensus was that they were still undecided. One of them, the youngest, said, "If you paid them with something more concrete. But whiskey—"

Quick laughed. "Who said anything about paying them with whiskey? I pay them whatever they want. There are some elements in every population which would prefer drink or other sensual pleasure to the tools of civilization. I pay in the currency of their own desire."

"From what I've seen," I said, "you pay them whatever's cheapest for you."

Quick smiled condescendingly. "You're a barbarian. You come from the century of Total War. How can we hold your opinion as worthwhile?"

"Since he has nothing to do with your try for power," Dru said, "he can be more objective than any of us."

"Look," I said, "my opinion doesn't matter. The lady wants her cruise ship back. I've been paid to get it for her. If the passengers want to stay here with you—"

"But how would we get back," Quick protested, "if you take the ship? That would be murder."

"Murder?" I said with an innocent look on my face. "Why would it be murder?"

"Because if I stopped supplying these stupid savages with whiskey for any length of time, they'd mob me."

"Is that so?" Dru cried triumphantly. "I thought you

were paying them with civilization."

It took a few seconds for the meaning of what had been said to dawn on Quick. When it did he said, pointing at me, "That barbarian tricked me. I've been tricked."

"The stranger made his point," one of the time travelers said. "I'd like to register disapproval of Mr. Quick's uncivilized schemes. I ought to be ashamed it took me so long to realize this." One by one the others joined him, ranging themselves behind Dru. Only the bald fat man remained with Quick.

"O. K.," I said. "We'll take the time ship now."

"You'll have to kill me first," Quick said.

"Don't be a fool," one of the men advised him. "You've played your hand and lost."

"I'm not starting all over again," Quick insisted. "I've built something good here."

I looked at Dru. "How does your century go for the use of force?"

"When necessary, we use it."

I took out my Magnum .357 and showed Quick the business end. "The ship," I said. "Tell us where it is. You can come back with us or not, it's all the same to my client. But she wants her time ship."

The cavemen filed by with their heavy trays of ore, sweating feverishly. Quick watched them for a moment and watched the billowing, hissing steam. Something leaped in his eyes, a new light which hadn't been there. It was radiant. It was a look of sheer joy, of bliss—but of madness too.

"I've taught them civilization!" Quick screamed. "I've given them that, haven't I?"

Even the fat man stared at him doubtfully now. He shook his round hairless head and joined Dru and the others. Quick said, "Desert me, all of you. I don't care. I taught these savages civilization, but they've taught me something. They've taught me violence. You think I fear you? Not with what they taught me!" he cried.

"Take it easy," Dru said. "You need medical care."

"The next great advance," Quick screamed. "Intertemporal exploitation. The next step in human achievement exists in me, don't you see it—a wedding of civilization and violence."

I advanced on him slowly with the Magnum through the steam. He look at me and laughed and suddenly lunged at the nearest caveman,

grasping the heavy tray of ore and hurling it at me with amazing strength, with the strength of a madman.

I did the only thing I could do under the circumstances. I ducked.

The tray spun through air and steam and struck the superheated wall just as cold water was applied. "Hit the ground!" I yelled, and then a violent explosion deafened all of us and burst rock flew in all directions, red hot and as dangerous as shrapnel.

When the steam cleared, half a dozen cavemen were dead or dying of burns and shrapnel wounds. Hysterical now, Quick wrestled a spear away from one of the cavemen and held all of them at bay with it. They milled about angrily, jabbering among themselves. They pointed accusingly at Quick and even more accusingly at the fire which he had brought them, the controlled fire which they did not understand, which they were not ready for yet.

I still held the Magnum. I moved toward Quick. "You better drop the spear," I said. "You've done enough damage already." I walked among the dead bodies. Heads were crushed and limbs cracked by the shrapnel. The floor of the cave was slippery with blood.

Quick didn't answer me. I expected the cavemen to charge him with their own spears, flint-tipped and deadly, but they were watching me.

Dru said, "We can't punish. They've got to do it themselves."

I shrugged. Dru didn't understand and there wasn't time to explain it to her now.

Abruptly Quick lunged at me with the spear. I leaped aside and it caught on my trousers.

I didn't want to hit Quick. I wanted to leave him for the cavemen. It was an incredible shot, a lucky shot. You can't aim a Magnum that well.

The Magnum roared and the spear haft shattered. The cavemen screamed and retreated as I waded in on Quick and drove my fists into his body, then raised them and pile-driven for his head while he swatted ineffectually with weaker blows.

"That's enough," Dru finally said. I could barely see her through the fresh steam which came from deeper within the cavern. "You'll kill him."

The natives came and studied their unconscious God. They looked at the dead men too and I knew they wanted retribution.

"We'll leave him here,"

Dru said. "Let their own laws punish him."

"I thought they had no laws."

"They didn't have any, but Quick brought them that at least."

We found the time cruiser and went inside, but a delegation of cavemen came and beckoned us outside. I thought they were beckoning us, but they only wanted me. I was Quick's conqueror. I went with them across the hills a little way and there on a bare crag overlooking their lush green valley was Quick. They had lashed him to nearby trees with tough plaited rope. He was dying.

The cavemen looked at me. They smiled. When I said nothing, they led me back to the time cruiser.

Dru dropped me off, picked up Elgin, who had been able to shuttle them this far from his base in the twentieth century.

Quick was deified, but not under his own name. They forgot his name but somehow they remembered the name of his company. He had brought them fire and they were not ready for fire so they had punished him with the first human laws.

Under the name of Prometheus.

THE END



...OR SO YOU SAY

BY THE READERS

Dear Mr. Browne:

My, but aren't we sneaky slipping serials in the coffee? Up until this time I was busy buying S-F pocket novels and didn't realize that the 5½ x 7½ magazines were swell also. Out I went and bought your January copy without knowing about Mr. Banister's four-part serial but it's so good (along with the others) that I don't mind in the least. You'll find me faithful to AMAZING after this. It was an excellent way to start the New Year.

"This Way Out," Feb. 1956, was the most. I like surprise endings. On your cover was the query: "Why had this metal man become a ravaging monster?" I'll bite! Why?

Usually I'm not the egotist but this time I have to be. I am going to list all the types of S-F I can, tell what I like and dislike (personal opinion) and see how many dirty cracks I get from other readers. Hope I don't fill up too much valuable space.

1. Highly Complicated—A. E. Van Vogt got me interested in S-F with his absolutely intricate plots. My favorite type.

2. Informative—I guess most stories (by good writers) have a fair amount of scientific fact to back up their work. Many are professors, scientists, etc., anyway.

3. Religious—I like the S-F cults such as were shown in "Sword of Rhiannon" (Leigh Brackett).

4. Dangling—How I love dangling stories where you must draw your own conclusion.

5. Surprise Ending—real crazy type: ex., "This Way Out," "Mind Bet" (George Julius).

6. Action—"Call Him Colossus," "Scarlet Saint" (great percentage).

7. Future Wars—such as Third World War, its after-effects, the end of the world type.

8. Invasion—from other worlds, (it's been abused but still good reading.) "War of the Worlds" is an excellent example.

9. Dimension—love those dimensional ones.

10. Time Distortion—traveling in time or having time changed because of trips to the stars. "Return to Tomorrow" by L. Ron Hubbard.

11. Fantastic things of the present—such as "Better Change Your Mind" (was a pun intended here, Thames!) "Alias Jane Doe" by Theodore Mathieson, "Jukebox," Arthur Sellings and "John Thomas' Cube" by John Leimert.

12. Philosophical—having a moral; very common by the top writers of today: examples, "1984" and "City," two of my five favorites.

13. Ironic—anyone read "The Conquerors," Ed M. Clinton, Jr.? That'll explain it. (Also "This Way Out.")

14. John Carter Series are tremendous—they are simply good yarns in the future but they're interesting. (Also the AMAZON SERIES, "Captain Jet.")

Still being egotistic and still using up precious space, I will now disclose what I dislike. Maybe, because of this, a friendly little debate may ensue among readers all armed to the teeth with ray guns.

1. Detective—the Mike Hammer, Perry Mason thrillers of the future. Ugh! leave it to the present. "Caves of Steel," Isaac Asimov is a good example. I enjoyed it but... Also "Quick Cure," Randall Garratt and "Sore Spot," Ivor Jorgenson.

2. Humor—that kills the tale unless you have a sense of humor—who has? "Leave It to Umpax," Eric Dean and "Picture That," Norman Arkaway.

3. Too much fact—wrecks the whole fiction part going into boring details. "Sands of Mars," Arthur C. Clarke was the worst book I've ever read.

4. Journalistic—next most nauseating kind; "War with the Newts," Karel Capek and "Martian Chronicles." Sounds like a diary, "Robinson Crusoe" or "Dragnet."

5. Too much detail (see 3)—It took me five months to cover "Mission of Gravity," Hal Clement, it was so boring.

6. First person—"I did this, I did that," it's for the birds. Only a good plot saves this method of telling a story.

7. Weird—now I don't care what people say. Vampires, ghosts, etc. just don't fit into my kind of S-F. They're fine in their own Horror Cabinet but keep them out of the S-F desk. (example, "Human?")

8. Ray Bradbury—who says he writes S-F. I read his anthology "Golden Apples of the Sun." All of them were a collection of fairy tales for the kiddies or plain, meaningless stories. I'm just ignorant, I guess—but I no go Brad at all. (Good thing it's a free country.)

9. I don't like stories I don't understand. "Autofac," Phillip K. Dick, was one—and those tales where someone is talking in high-class scientific garble the layman doesn't get; that's out, it's poor.

Compared to a few years ago (and I am not speaking as an authority), science fiction has changed. It used to be an action-packed adventure with no deliberate end to attain along the Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers style. Now, more than ever, the slower-moving S-F has replaced the faster-moving, adventurous kind. Today, top writers write scientific and sophisticated literature, "1984" and "City," which sets you reflecting and pondering for hours on end. The latter is excellent, I believe—and the best. There is, however, a vast majority of Vary Pacers today such as appear in AMAZING containing a little of both philosophy and adventure.

"The Scarlet Saint" is a good example. It's fast-moving containing intrigue, fighting, spying. It's slow-moving, allowing us to ponder on how magnificent Man could become, teaching us how wonderful freedom can be. Van Vogt's are great for concentration; and such tales as "Let Out the Beast" and "Long, Loud Silence" (Leonard Fischer and Wilson Tucher) try to show us how evil a radioactive war would be and how stupid Man can get, how barbaric he can become.

Okay, let's have indignant or pleasant replies from other readers. I'm ready. Not only your serial, but all your fine stories have gained you an AMAZING fan. Bon chance!

Don Legere
24 Locke S.,
Hamilton, Ontario

- You don't leave an editor much room for comment, Mr. Legere. You say just about everything there is to be said. Except, thanks for this very interesting letter and please write us again very soon.—ED.

Dear Mr. Browne:

As usual the March issue of AMAZING was excellent. "The Iron Virgin" was marvelous—action galore. It reminds me that often in the past, machines had their own way. For example, how often did your car act up for no reason, then would behave again. So "The Iron Virgin" has a point.

"The Vacation" was very good.

W. C. Brandt

Apt. N.

1725 Geminary Ave.

Oakland 21, Calif.

- You know—our car has been acting like that for years and we've been too dense to find the reason. Believe us—that Chevy's really going to get told off tonight!—ED.

Dear Editor:

Just thought that I would drop you a line to let you know that my business associates and I think that Mr. Manly Banister is one hell of a good author. We have read the beginning of his four part serial, "The Scarlet Saint." It is what we salesmen refer to as a "duz." It "duz" everything as far as good reading is concerned. Your AMAZING magazine is really living up to its title.

We'll be reading your editorial in the next issue.

Joe Youngblood

6216 So. Major

Chicago 38, Ill.

- Your letter conjures up for us a vision, Mr. Youngblood; that of dozens of salesmen sitting around the office reading AMAZING STORIES. Gratifying, yet disturbing. We wouldn't want our Manly Banister to be responsible for starting a new depression. You know—no commissions, no money to buy future issues of AMAZING. Could be serious. By the way—what do you boys sell?—ED.

Dear Sir:

I have just finished reading my February number of AMAZING STORIES and it is my first in years and I am glad to be back again.

The cover picture is swell because it illustrates a part of the first story.

Next on my list, are the letters. I read every one of them and think that they are all swell even though I may not agree with them.

I liked each and every one of the stories in this issue and I shall try to get the next issue at the book store and if it is as good as this one, I shall send in my subscription.

Fred G. Michel
Veterans Hospital
Bldg. 62, Room 205
Sapulveda, Calif.

• *We thank you, Mr. Michel. And our subscription department also thanks you—in advance.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have suffered long in silence, but now I feel that I have something to say. I don't care for the letter column in AMAZING. That may sound foolish since I'm writing this one.

I like the stories a great deal because I am an S-F fan, and I find most of the stories are very good. But, I am not a great letter writing fan. The articles and editorials are very thought provoking and provide the balance necessary to a good magazine.

The letter column, on the other hand, seems to provide nothing but an overlarge number of pages devoted to trying to find someone who shares certain opinions with reader-penmen. In the last issue, you published something like a dozen-and-a-half letters. You could hardly expect this to be the consensus of opinion on any subject.

Frankly, if I like a story no one else will affect my feeling with a biased opinion in letter form. If I don't like the stories, no number of letters to the contrary could make me like them. I don't believe that the letter-writing fans are trying to show what a great interest they have in science fiction; I

think it is more a need to find someone who shows sympathy, sort of a crying towel, toward their ideas.

They don't particularly care for science fiction as long as they can turn to the letter column and find someone there who shares their views. They could get this form of comradery from a pen-pal organization and not clutter the pages of an otherwise good book.

In the end it will be your sales and not your letter column that dictate which stories to print and which to leave out. When the sales drop off not all the letters to the contrary will make you believe that your magazine is good. On the other hand, all the bad opinions in the world won't keep the sales from rising if you have a good magazine.

I say keep up with your present high standard of stories and let the letter readers and writers find somewhere else to send their letters. I'll take a good story to a letter any day.

Allen C. Miller
2225 E. Bellevue
Phoenix, Arizona

• *Glad you wrote us, Allen. Sorry you dislike the Reader's section, but perhaps it will be like the man who hated swimming. After they finally got him into the water, he liked it so well they couldn't get him out.—ED.*

Dear Editor:

I finally decided to write to you. Some people can be satisfied all the time, some part of the time, and others you'd never be able to satisfy. It takes all kinds of stories to make a book, but if you have the same kind of stories all the time it would get tiresome. I'm the type of person that loves to read. And I like reading science-fiction magazines, and I like yours. I buy all the science-fiction magazines that are put out every month, and I enjoy them all. But what made me decide to write was J. W. Downing's letter in the April issue. I think he was being very silly, you can't always tell whether the public will like all the stories in an issue, all you can do is hope. Everyone has different taste in reading material. I wish people would think of these things before writing letters. Even if I don't like one or two of the stories maybe someone else will, that doesn't spoil the whole book.

In closing I want to thank you for very interesting magazines.

Audrey Woollums
2718 Ballantine Blvd.
Norfolk 9, Va.

* *Audrey, for a long time we've been carrying a citation around with us and it is with great pleasure that we now confer it upon you. We therefore dub thee, Miss Ideal-Science-Fiction-Reader-of-the-Year.—ED.*

Dear Sir:

First off—I like AMAZING better all the time... except for the serial. I hate serials. But I can't resist reading them. And what happened to the cartoons?

Second—the February issue in particular—your editorial was the kind I like—saved me the trouble of thinking. Stories all entertaining. "The Spectroscope" best I've seen yet. Is Mr. Gerson part poet? "Ricket of a lost rocket-stick" indeed! Maybe I'm too easily pleased, but such little things make me enjoy a reviewer more. (I'm a frustrated poet myself!)

Third—to Jan Sadler—what's unusual about a 22-year-old mother of three children? (As a matter of fact, I have only two children.) Even so, my male cousin, age 22, also has two children. It's not so much the science-fiction influence as the long, cold winters here in Alaska. Incidentally, please don't call me "Mr." Clark anymore! I'm getting teased unmercifully by my husband and all my friends up on the hill.

Patricia Anne Clark
Box 426
College, Alaska

* *In order to save wear and tear on our typewriter, would you please refer to our comment on Mr. Miller's letter, substituting the word serial for the words letter column? Thank you very, very much.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

I've been reading AMAZING for five years now and until the "new size brainstorm," I'd always thought it was far from mediocre, in fact, it was and could be well above aver-

age. Believe me, I'm glad that you're trying to go back to your "pulp" perfection with new and better stories. It's really about time don't you think? Speaking of story material, last issue, Kendahl and Thames' efforts were the only ones worth reading. Two's better than none though. Agreed?

As you probably guessed, this is the first time I've penned a letter to any S-F mag. Your eagerness for your readers' opinions was what prompted me to take the leap. Hope you keep up the good work. (I mean your improvements, of course.)

Your "Observatory" rates the *humorous* and *interesting* category and that goes ditto for "Or So You Say." But give us AS readers a break and at least make up your mind about which set of "book reports," you want (it is a necessary evil?) to publish and have three departments and five stories. By the way, whether you know it or not, there are scads of readers (myself included) who like action as well as good science-type adult-minded stories. Why not try combining the two? You may find to your delight, that *that* is just what kind of ASF mag personality that will sell best.... Now that I've "screamed" my quota for the time being I'll quit. But you will no doubt be hearing from my new found pen again. I'm among those who prefer the quieter covers. (So people won't think I'm reading trashy westerns at first glance.)

Mark Argy
146-78th St.
Niagara Falls, N.Y.

• *You would make a good trial examiner, Mr. Argy. That place in your letter where you say: "Two's better than none, though. Agreed?" If we but nodded our head you would snap back: "Then you agree that there were only two good stories in the issue!" But you can't trap us, Mr. Argy. So, after consulting our lawyer, our answer is a firm: "All the stories in the issue were strictly top-drawer, sir."—ED.*

—Continued from Back Cover

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